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JAN., 1910

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Vol. X

No. 4

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A PUBLICATION FOR THE HOME

JANUARY

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SMITH'S MAGAZINE

VOLUME 10

JANUARY, 1910

NUMBER 4

Photographic
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MISS MAXINE ELLIOTT





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As "Juliet"

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MISS LOUISE LeBARON
In light opera

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MALVINA LONGFELLOW
Lately with "The Great
John Ganton"

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MISS LAURA NELSON HALL
In "The Sins of Society"

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MISS ALICE DOVEY
With "A Stubborn Cinderella"

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In "The Melting Pot"

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MRS. LESLIE CARTER
In a new play

Photo by Sarony, N. Y.



MISS KITTIE GORDON
With Sam Bernard in "The Girl and the Wizard"

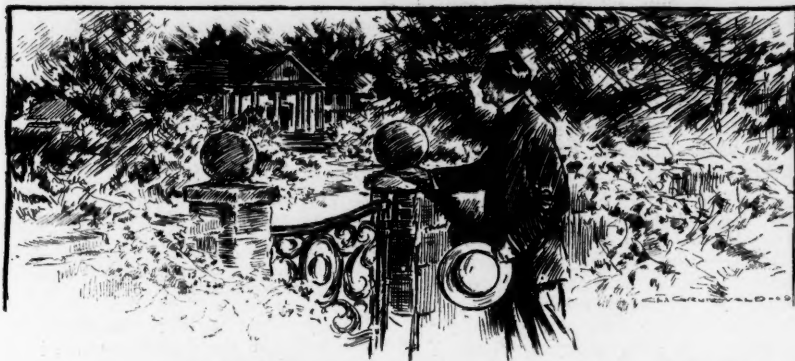
Photo by The Dover Studios, London



MISS MARY MANNERING
Starring in "Kiddie"

Photo by Moffett, Chicago

WELLS WITHOUT WATER



BY ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

ILLUSTRATED BY CH. GRUNWALD

HE had lived in New York as far back as memory went, and was almost as firmly rooted there as any native. Yet, as his train sped farther and farther South, seldom out of sight of the blue Appalachians, his bosom swelled with the tenderness of the exile, homeward bound. In this Southland lay the dust of his ancestors. Here, his family, transplanted from across the sea, when the Indian was a familiar figure in every town, had grown from a slender sapling into a wide-branching tree. In the annals of this section, his forbears had writ their name large.

The stricken land from which his father had fled in the decade following the war, when Hallam Taney was but a child, was now showing signs of resuscitation. New towns were springing up, old towns were taking on new life. The hum of sawmills, the clatter of looms, and the crunch of steel rolls were frequent sounds where the train stopped. Skies which had once been darkened by the smoke of battle and burning towns were now pierced by factory chimneys.

Yet, after all, these tokens of com-

merce were only sporadic. The bulk of the land was still a waste. Ceres, goddess of field and garden, still drowsed. Frequently, it was miles between the little clearings in the forest, and the habitations commonly glimpsed from the car window were negro cabins. When an antebellum mansion hove into view, it was too often a gaunt, pitiful, abandoned thing, sans doors and windows, with all traces of human occupancy obliterated by the unsparing hand of Time. The negro had given and he had taken away. He had made the South white with cotton; at the next turn of the celestial wheel upon which human destiny hangs, he had blackened it as by fire.

While Taney was at dinner, they passed a little hamlet, which seemed to be peopled exclusively by darkies. The luxuriantly appointed train swept through it indifferently. No passengers of the Gulf Express had any more business with these people than with the man in the moon. Taney smiled half sadly at the thought.

"I wonder if Esther can be buried alive in some such hole as that!" he murmured to himself.

Almost his mother's last words, as he was leaving home, had been: "Find Esther, Hallam, if you can." Esther! It was a name with which he had been familiar from childhood—a name often on his mother's lips when she was unwinding the skeins of the past.

The negro, though yoked like an ox to till the soil, had prepared the South for a vastly different harvest. Seeing in his master a superior being, a god, as it were, he had yearned for a libation of the Olympian blood to be poured into his own veins. He had yearned—subconsciously, of course—to have the kink smoothed out of his wool, the pigment washed from his skin. Alas, he had not yearned in vain! The god, stooping from his high position, in lawless pleasure, not benevolence, had granted the fancied boon.

Esther was one of the unfortunates who had received the fatal infusion of white man's blood, in triple measure. She was a quadroon, almost as fair as her mistress, and more beautiful. Yet she understood the social abyss which separated her from her mistress, and had made a most faithful servant. Once she had performed, at the risk of her life, an act of devotion which no Taney could ever forget. Hence, when old Bidwell Taney, Hallam's grandfather, died, a few days before Appomattox, thanking God with his last breath that he would not live to hear of Lee's surrender, Esther was formally freed, and given a section of land. She remained, however, with Hallam's parents, until they fled from the pandemonium of reconstruction; then, resisting their solicitations for her to go North with them, she sold half her land—it brought but a paltry price in that black hour of despair for the South—and slipped away.

She disappeared as absolutely as if swallowed by the earth. For twenty-five years all efforts of the Taney's to trace her were in vain. Then came the letter which was now taking Hallam South. It was from a Savannah lawyer named Richard King, and ran as follows:

The south half of Section No. 2, town of Trempealeau, adjoining the Taney plantation on the west, has recently fallen into the hands of a client of mine. Sulphur deposits have been discovered on this land. Their value is yet problematical, of course, but as my client—a Madame de la Pagerie, formerly of St. Pierre, Martinique—is anxious to return to her native country, she will sell the property at a very slight advance over its cost.

I write to you because you hold the contiguous land on three sides, and could develop the sulphur mines more advantageously than any one else. Moreover, should you desire to rehabilitate your plantation, as many in this section are now doing, you would doubtless desire this land of Madame de la Pagerie's, lying as it does squarely within your boundaries.

Taney was not averse to playing a small rôle in the resurrection of his native section, and was curious to look into the sulphur project. Yet it was not the sulphur on the south half of section two which had brought him South, but the fact that this land was a part of Esther's inheritance, and, according to the county records, when last examined by Hallam's agent, was still in her possession. Hallam hoped that either King or Madame de la Pagerie might be able to give him some information regarding the fugitive.

He had not been South before in twelve years, but he and his mother had kept in touch with a few of the old antebellum friends. The first of these were Colonel Addison Dukelow and his spinster daughter, now living in Savannah. Therefore, upon reaching the city, Hallam registered at the great tourist caravansary, on the corner of Bull and Liberty Streets, and then bent his steps toward the home of the ex-planter.

Dukelow had once been as great a name in Tattnall County as Taney, but the family, like thousands of others in the South, had been wrecked by the war, and the little remnant of it now lived in a cottage, on a quiet back street. Yet, in spite of the loss of nearly everything that his heart had held dear, the veteran was still facing the world with the same unconquerable spirit which he had displayed in his

last desperate assault upon Sheridan's overwhelming force of cavalry, the day before Appomattox, when he knew in his heart that the Confederacy was dead. When a second glance revealed the identity of his visitor, his eighty years did not prevent him from springing to his feet.

"It warms my old shell of a heart to grasp the hand of a man bearing the honored name of Taney, especially when he is as handsome a young blade as you, my boy!" he cried. "A speaking likeness of your grandfather, Bidwell. Your father was a Palmer. Taney blood was potent, by Jupiter! It usually dominated whatever it mixed with. As old Bidwell used to say: 'Taney blood will make a lady out of a gypsy in two generations.' But when it met Palmer blood, it was Greek versus Greek. You ought to thank God, my boy, that you've got a quarter strain of each—to say nothing of the half strain of Streeter blood, from your lovely and devoted mother. But wheh's your baggage?"

Hallam's explanations were of no avail. The old gentleman stormed and swore until a black boy, with a push-cart, had set off for the hotel—a rather pathetic contrast to the coach-and-four which Addison Dukelow was wont, in days gone by, to dispatch for his guests. This accomplished, the colonel was ready to talk. Hallam, after explaining his business, asked him about Madame de la Pagerie.

"Fine people, seh—there are two of them. I haven't the honor of theh acquaintance, to be sure. They are newcomers, having moved here only about six years ago. But I heah the best reports about 'em. They live a very secluded life—which is nothing against them, in these promiscuous days; and I fancy they are poor—which is also nothing against them. The daughter teaches music. She gives lessons, in fact, to a young lady who lives next door. We frequently heah her sing. By Jupiter, seh, I don't expect to heah anything finer in Paradise. I've sat on this po'ch, seh, of a night, and listened to that voice until I imagined that it

was filtering down through the stars from heaven. Hal, I've had a good deal to make me cry in my time; and, though I don't remember that I *did* cry, that girl's voice summons the past before me, like some beautiful solemn pageant, moving to funereal music. Then I *do* cry. I'm free to admit it. Yes, seh, I cry like a schoolgull."

"What do you know about a lawyer here named Richard King?" asked Hallam, after an interval. "He is Madame de la Pagerie's agent."

The colonel wheeled in his chair, and bent a searching glance upon Taney from beneath his shaggy white brows.

"Is Richard King Madame de la Pagerie's agent?" he demanded.

"He is. What of it?"

The colonel puffed vigorously for a moment upon the rich Havana which Taney had handed him—such a cigar as only chance brought to him any more, in these degenerate days.

"Why, Hal, Rich King is a *nigger*!" he burst forth.

II.

There was a bellicose note in his sonorous voice. Hallam looked his surprise.

"Perhaps, in this day of African postmasters, collectors of the port, and so forth, it would be safer for me to say 'colored man,'" he continued sarcastically. "Not that there's much color about King. *You* wouldn't know him from a white man, though I could spot him at forty rods. Moreover, I happen to know his pedigree. Your grandfather once bought a bunch of servants in New O'Tans, shawtly after an epidemic of smallpox. Among 'em was a big Congo buck, who, on account of his size and dignity, was dubbed King Richard. I think he must have been a king, for I have often heard it told since how unbreakable his spirit was. Though I was only a little fellow, I remember him well, for both of his ears were notched. It may have been a badge of kingship in Congoland; it may have been the work of some infamous skipper on a slaver."

With his mind browsing in the distant past, he ceased speaking, as if unconscious of his listener. But finally he drifted into the sphere of the present again.

"To make a long story short, Hal, Rich King is a great-grandson of that King Richard. I don't keep a black 'Burke's Peerage,' but I happen to know that King Richard's daughter, named Vashti, was sold to your great-aunt, Eliza Humphrey, who died years before you were born. Vashti's daughter, whose name I forget, was the maid of Virginia Humphrey, Eliza's daughter, and was with Virginia when the war broke out. At that time she had a half-grown boy, and that boy was Rich King. I know it was a matter of remark at the time that you could scarcely tell him from a white boy. Moreover, he was so bright that his mother, poor as she was, sent him up Nawth to school somewhere, after the war."

"Is his pedigree generally known here in Savannah?"

"Not generally. Anyhow, it's not a thing that you hear mentioned once in a twelvemonth. The truth is, he keeps his place, and there's been a disposition to give him a fair show. But I wouldn't employ him myself, and I'm sorry that Madame de la Pagerie has. However, as long as she *has* done it, I don't believe I'd mention his color to her, if I were you. It would only worry her."

"I shall not," answered Taney. "I'm a little partial myself, I hope, to giving a man a fair show. Do you consider him honest?"

"Well," returned the colonel slowly, "honest men, white or black, are damned scarce nowadays. I'd almost sooner contract to find you a three-legged rooster than an honest man—specially a lawyer. King has done well. He's employed by some of our leading merchants—mostly newcomers from the Nawth, however. The old stock wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole, of co'se. His name was once connected here with a shady transaction, but he may have been innocent."

"But the point I had in mind is, that

if Esther still owned the land which Madame de la Pagerie bought, and the deal was made through King, he ought to be able to tell you something about Esther. It's likely that she knew who King was, and it's equally likely that he knew who she was. He must have been in his teens before she disappeared, and doubtless saw her often. He'd be likely to remember her, too, for she was an aristocrat in colored circles—white, beautiful, and rich. However, there is this to bear in mind. King may be touchy about admitting himself to be in the confidence of a colored person. The guilty flee when no man pursueth—if my scripture is correct. Moreover, he may be in no position to honorably give out any information about her."

"Why wouldn't it be a good scheme, then, for me to see Madame de la Pagerie first?" asked Taney. "She would have no object in concealing anything that she may know of Esther."

"It would be a first-rate scheme," answered the colonel, draining the last of his julep with a satisfied sigh. "Here's hopin' you may find Esther—for a right good girl she was. By gad, I've wondered a thousand times where she was, whether living or dead, in happiness or in squalid poverty."

"That illustrates how the trail of slavery still crisscrosses the South," observed the younger man. "Laying aside the presence of eight or nine million colored individuals, of all shades, wedged into the body of our white population, like quills in a porcupine, one can scarcely pick up the loose end of a thread anywhere, in social, political, or industrial life, but that he finds the other end knotted tightly in the defunct body of what we formerly styled our 'peculiar institution.'"

"It was peculiar," laughed the colonel. "It's funny that some of us didn't bust right out in church when parson, of a Sunday, would stick another scriptural prop under the tottering institution. But it wasn't funny before we got through with it. No, sirree! Your father was right, Hal, when he left the South. He knew she

was dead, and that there was no mercy in holding a corpse in his arms. I knew it, too, fo' that matter; but he went Nawth and made money, while I stayed heah and sucked soup bones. Yet, Hallam, with no disrespect to your father, whom I loved as a brother, I'd do the same thing over again. I just felt as if I had to stay and see the corpse decently laid away. I'm staying yet. But it won't be for long now. On my next birthday, if I live to see it, Hal, I'll be eighty-one."

The hawk moths, rifling the sweets of the petunia beds, were just blending with the dusk when Taney paused before the grilled gate which guarded number thirty Beaufort Lane. Each substantial brick pillar was crowned with an ancient iron torch basket, relics of the day when an armful of blazing pine knots used to speed the parting guest along streets as dark as Cimmerian cellars. The low, spreading cottage just inside the fence resembled a huge green mound, so knotted, laced, and banded about as it with climbing roses, honeysuckle, trumpet vine, and Virginia creeper. Through this tangle of foliage, the front door and the windows peeped out, like shy faces, wanting to see, but fearing to be seen.

Taney tugged at the old-fashioned bell pull in the right-hand post. The gate swung open, a moment later, by means of some invisible mechanical contrivance, and Madame de la Pagerie appeared in the door. She was just such a person as one would expect to find in such a house—reserved, timid as a mouse, dating back a generation or more, and appareled so daintily as to make one think of a miniature or a cherished piece of eggshell china. Her visitor took her to be not over forty years old until she introduced as her daughter a young woman who could not have been less than twenty-two or three, and was taller by nearly a head than her mother. She merely bowed, and afterward effaced herself, in favor of her mother, with an art which Taney fancied must be as rare as it was difficult.

The low-ceiled rooms were as cool and shadowy as a grotto. A linnet, whose odd little rattan cage hung at a window, sang softly to himself—chanting his vespers, as it were. A big maltese cat dozed on a taborer just beneath the cage, apparently innocent of the fact that birds are edible. In the opposite corner of the room stood a small grand piano—its mahogany case rather out of keeping with the other furnishings.

"If you pliss, we shall be seat' in the court," said Madame de la Pagerie, in a soft, delicious patois. "My child Jacqueline hass a pupil to come soon, and you will, therefore, be so kind as to excuse her."

Hallam would fain have tarried a little longer in the presence of the statuesque, fair-haired girl who, in her loose empire gown, looked like a shepherdess in some simple pastoral play—a modest flower grown in mellow, woodsy soil, rather than a gorgeous, exotic bloom. Freckles, tan, and muscularity—summer affectations of most of the girls Taney knew—seemed very commonplace acquisitions, indeed, in the presence of Jacqueline de la Pagerie. However, he was forced to follow madame into the "court," wondering what kind of a place this might be.

In some hands, he soon perceived, it would have been a plain back yard. Coralie de la Pagerie had transformed it into just what she called it. A space some forty feet square was inclosed by a high brick wall, tapestried with vines and topped with rather wicked-looking broken bottles, set in cement. The paving was brick—cool, damp, red brick—in the centre of which gleamed a pool containing goldfish and a few pond lilies. Four magnolias canopied the inclosure, rendering it nearly dark at this hour, and exuding a perfume almost too rich and heavy for Hallam's Northern nostrils. It filled the place like incense, and he imagined that it would be easy for a man to be bewitched here—especially if Jacqueline were sitting near.

His hostess excused herself for a moment, and as he awaited her return there floated from the house a mellow,



Hallam's eyes shared the mist in hers, and nothing was said for several minutes.

contralto voice, stopped down to the volume of a lullaby. The song was a simple little thing, but as it developed the voice softly throbbed with passion, as if recounting childhood's golden dreams—alas, but dreams!—the mystery of love and beauty, sunrise and sunset, life and death. Then it was joined by a child's artless, quavering soprano, and the spell was broken. The pupil was receiving its lesson.

After bringing out a pitcher of lemonade and a plate of macaroons, Madame de la Pagerie sank into a low wicker chair. In spite of her modulated tones and quiet, gracious manner, she betrayed a slight self-consciousness. A certain alertness, a touch of color in her cheeks, and a brilliancy of eye hinted that she was somewhat excited by the presence of a prospective

purchaser of her land. Possibly, too, Taney imagined, she was somewhat disturbed that he should have come to her instead of her agent. He therefore hastened to extract himself from what might be a false position.

"I expect, of course," he began, "to transact my business through your agent, Mr. King."

"Yez, of co'se. That would be bes', no doubt!" exclaimed madame, with her bland, childlike smile.

"What I came here this evening to see you about," he continued, "is of a personal nature. I presume you know the name of the person from whom you bought this land?"

"The name? Oh, yez. It was a Madame—a Mistress Young."

"Do you recall her given name?"

"Let me think! It must have been—yez, it was Es-thair."

"I supposed it was she. She was once a servant in our family—a very good and faithful servant, whom we have not seen for many years. I am anxious to get some trace of her, if possible." He added, after a pause: "You may not have been aware of the fact, but she is a colored woman."

Madame de la Pagerie's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Surely not. She is as white as you or I."

Taney's glance fell from her bright, inquiring eyes. "In appearance, I know. But her parentage is not pure; therefore, by the standards of our country, she is colored."

"Are those stan'ards not mos' peculiar?" she asked innocently.

"Perhaps so, but I did not make them."

"Oh, pardon!" she exclaimed quickly, and he felt that she was getting the best of the rencontre.

"You saw her, then," he observed.

"Yez—in Mr. King's office."

"Did she chance to mention where she is now living?"

She delicately caressed her high-piled coiffure with one hand and shook her head. "I do not think she mention' the place. Now you ques'ion me about it, I remember she did not talk much."

"Very likely. Was there anything in her appearance to give you a hint as to how she might be circumstanced?"

"You mean how she was dressed? Well, she was dressed as well as I—maybe better. I did not look close. But a woman's dress!" She shrugged her shoulders prettily. "Would you judge from that? I have known them to go without bread to get a dress. Then, uzzer times, I have thought it would have been better if they *had* gone without bread."

Hallam roused to the fact that the woman before him was not the child which her patois and delicious frankness would lead one to think her.

"I have feared Esther might be in want," he continued. "I know how much she got for the first half of that section—about five dollars an acre. I fancy the other half is not worth any more, if as much. I do not look upon that land as real estate. It suckled six generations of Taney's—fed and clothed them, educated them, sent them to Europe, brought them costly luxuries from across the sea. Selling it for such a pitiable price seems like handing a crust to an old friend who has feasted you at his table in better days."

Madame de la Pagerie sipped at her lemonade. "I presume if it was not for the sulphur discover' beneath it, that land would not now be worth even so much as five dollar. In those days you spik of it was fertilize' different."

"Fertilized?"

"Yez—by the sweat of the slave."

Soft as was the reproach, it brought the blood to Hallam's cheek. By some perversity of words, he seemed fated at every turn of the conversation to be thrown on the wrong side of the question.

"That was a fertilizer, as you call it,

of very doubtful value," he answered. "I believe that it is now universally recognized that slave labor was economically as well as morally wrong. That is to say, it cost more than free labor."

"In blood and tears and broken hearts, as well as money!" exclaimed madame. "But I should not talk so to you. Maybe I offend. We of Martinique are not like you of America. Maybe we do not know all—eh!" She laughed merrily.

The sound of footsteps arrested Taney's answer. Jacqueline appeared, followed by a man whose air of distinction and striking physical beauty drew an admiring glance from Hallam. The newcomer wore an immaculate suit of duck and carried a cap of the same material in a hand which certainly had never known manual labor, so white and shapely was it. Tawny hair curled over a lofty, finely retreating brow, which well matched the faultless Greek nose below.

At the gentleman's appearance, Coralie de la Pagerie laid her forefinger on her lips for an instant, in a puzzled, half-annoyed manner, which made Taney suspect himself of having obtruded upon some social arrangement—possibly a lovers' tryst. So he rose at once, and turned from his chair in a definitive manner, indicating his intention of leaving. But Coralie restrained him.

"It iss a good omen and plissent as well for bot' you gentlemen to meet in my house!" she exclaimed gayly. "Meester Taney, permit me to prisent Meester King!"

III.

Had she tossed the contents of the lemonade pitcher into his face, Hallam would not have been more astonished. It was one thing for a "colored" man to look white, as Colonel Dukelow had informed him King did. It was quite another thing for him to wear the detached, worldly air that one associates with painters and poets. Hallam could not yet believe that such a thing was possible.

"Not Mr. King, the attorney?" he observed, as he took the other's proffered hand.

"The same," answered King, in his even, flexible voice.

The halo about the man vanished. The enunciation of those two words, in spite of the evenness and flexibility of his voice, made his negro origin credible to Taney. He could hardly have described the peculiar inflection, quickly as his ear had caught it, but it was a sort of tonguing or voicing "t" into a half-fledged "d."

A moment of constraint followed. Taney understood now the shadow of annoyance which had flitted across madame's face, and he himself felt as if an explanation of his presence in this house was due King as Madame de la Pagerie's agent. At the same time, recalling Colonel Dukelow's caution, he felt a delicacy about speaking of Esther to King in the presence of the two ladies. However, there seemed no other way out of the dilemma.

As he spoke he was conscious of a subtle change in the lawyer's physiognomy—a barely perceptible narrowing of his lids, a slight setting of his lips.

"I have no doubt she was the woman you describe," answered King courteously, but impersonally. "However, I know absolutely nothing of her. I found her in my office one day, on returning from dinner, and I saw her but once after that—in the presence of Madame de la Pagerie and her daughter, here."

Taney felt certain that the man was lying, but anything like a cross-examination was out of the question, on the present occasion, at least; and, a few minutes later, after promising to call on the lawyer at his earliest convenience, he took his departure.

On his first visit to Lindenwald, Hallam wanted to be alone—at least, with no other company than the spectres of the past—and he had reserved the next day for his sacred pilgrimage. A ride of an hour and a half by rail, to the somnolent little town of Pin Oak, and then a five-mile drive over a wretched

clay road, brought him to the entrance of his ancestral home.

There was little in sight to remind one of home—of the long line of men and women who had here first and last seen the light. Desolation reigned supreme. Abandonment was writ large in the jungle which had once been fields, in fences which had sunk into mould. Where posts still stood, at distant intervals, poison ivy and trumpet creeper had wound them round and round with snaky coils; while dodder, wild grape, and honeysuckle had woven many-braided cables between. Hedges had become rows of trees, the sturdier individuals fighting for place and space almost like sentient beings. The driveway, once kept as clean as a doorstep by a squad of pickaninnies, was now wheel-deep with grass and weeds. Everything, in fact, was buried under a tropical luxuriance of vegetation, and this impression was heightened by an ardent sun, which flooded the landscape with a heat that rebounded from the ground in sensible pulsations, and found voice, it seemed, in a multitudinous insect life.

The expansive roof of the homestead, lifting above the tops of an inclosing grove of trees, about a mile away, was the only sign of human handiwork visible from the gate. The place seemed to lie under the spell of some foul enchantress. The song of the darkies in the cotton fields had long since been silenced—yea, the fields themselves had vanished. The live oaks along the avenue, which once had echoed the jest and laughter of galloping young cavaliers and their sweethearts, now gave forth nothing more cheerful than the threnody of doves. The venerable mansion itself, with its spacious two-storied verandas and hospitable front door, seemed to have fallen into a deep sleep—not the sleep which restores, but a repulsive, narcotic torpor, from which awakening is doubtful.

Indeed, Hallam knew well there would be no awakening. A new South might come; in fact, seemed to be coming. But it would be new in very

truth; it would not be the old South brought to life again. As he stood in the unmown front yard—possibly on the very site of his young mother's canna beds—and reflected on the varied flood of human life which had ebbed and flowed about the spot, his throat ached.

Here, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, for five generations back, had come into being, lived, worked, married, wrought, sang, suffered, begat, and died, to be laid at rest in the little graveyard on the knoll between the house and the river. To this house his mother, now a silver-haired woman of seventy, had been brought as a bride. In this house she had thrilled as only a mother can thrill at the first faint cry of her babe.

How often, in the pearly dawn, had her feet pressed the wet paths of her beloved garden—now only a confused camp of vegetal barbarians, bursting through the gaps in the wall! How often had she stood on these broad front steps, now fast disintegrating, to greet a cavalcade of guests—maybe friends from a neighboring plantation, maybe distinguished guests of her husband, from Savannah, Charleston, Atlanta, or even distant New Orleans!

The "quarters" were roofless and deserted; no negro's crooning lullaby had issued from their doors for a generation now. But beyond the ruined stables was a cabin, in which lived old Naomi and her son, caretakers of Lindenwald, after their shiftless fashion, ever since the master of the place had exiled himself in the North. Toward this cabin Hallam presently bent his steps—not to see Naomi the caretaker, but Naomi the mother of Esther!

She had been apprised of Hallam's coming, and she had not failed to set herself and her household in order. When he first spied her, she was sitting on the shady side of her cabin, in the angle formed by the great stick-and-clay chimney. In spite of her advanced age, she occupied a straight-backed chair, while her only rocker stood near by, ready for her guest. Her dress was only checked gingham,

but it was spotless and starched and ironed as only she could starch and iron. On her head perched a dainty lace cap, not improbably one of the same lot which she used to wear when lady's maid in the "great house." She had never used tobacco, even in the form of snuff, so that the customary aunty's clay pipe was not between her lips. She merely sat with folded hands, a rather pathetic figure, and yet as prim and upright as if posing for her picture.

Pompey, her son, a man of fifty, lay on his back in the grass, smoking a very long and slender, home-made stogy. Though his mother would have been described, at an antebellum slave sale, as a "light mulatto," Pomp was as brown as a cocoanut, and as coarsely featured as a full-blood. He was a half-brother, of course, to Esther; but she had taken a step ahead of her mother, in the blanching process, while Pomp had retrograded a step.

At sight of Hallam, Naomi arose, advanced slowly but firmly to meet him, and kissed him on the cheek, as naturally as if she had been his grandmother. More than a decade had passed since she had last seen him, but she greeted him as simply as if they had parted only the day before. Pomp lumbered to his feet, grinned, and in the thick, guttural articulation of the isolated, rice-field black, said: "Hahdy, Marse Hollam!"

Very different was his mother's speech. She had lived in the great house from her childhood to near her fiftieth year. Her associates, during this formative period, had been white rather than black; and her English was purer than that of most of the "poor whites" of the section.

Taney glanced over the acre or two of cultivation which surrounded the cabin. The use of the land was the only compensation which Naomi had ever accepted for the protection which her presence afforded the house, but it seemed a slender source of support to Hallam.

"Aunty, are you ever in want?" he asked.

She did not answer at once, but sat with her faded eyes fixed upon a distant bank of glistening clouds—possible heralds of a shower. There was nothing even faintly evil or sinister about her, and yet, as Hallam furtively studied her dreamy, far-away face, it occurred to him that a more superstitious age would have found in her the enchantress who had laid the spell of death, not only upon Lindenwald, but upon a thousand other fair plantations in the South. Was it because the Anglo-Saxon had held her in bond, body and soul? Because he had begot, yet denied, her? Or was it because of something profounder, subtler, more impersonal than this—something touching the very core of existence?

"Marse Hallam," said she finally, "you ask if I'm in want. I'm always in want. I want my kind. I want something I shall never have ag'in until I cross river Jordan. Do you reckon I'll have it then, fo' shuh? Sometimes when I lay here at night, I think I heah the hosses stampin' on the stable flo'. Then I heah Marse Bidwell callin' from the po'ch: 'Tip! Oh, Tip! Saddle Archie, and be d—d quick about it!' Then I wake up. I hang on to that dream like a starvin' hawg hangs on to an ear of cawn, but it gits away. Young marster, Tip saddled Archie for your grandpaw, the last time, mo'n forty years ago. All the things I want have been grave dust this long time."

"You are not alone in that want," said Taney. "I am sure that mother shares it with you, many times. I find her in tears oftener than I like."

"Poo' little Miss Patty!" exclaimed Naomi, under her breath, touching her eyes with a worn but snowy lace handkerchief. "I 'member her so well the day you come. She was pretty low—kind of delirious in her head—and young marster, your paw, was walkin' about with a white face; and missy said to me: 'N'omi, I don't want to play here no more. I want to go home to my mamma.' 'Peared like she forgot she was growed up and been married more'n a year."

Hallam's eyes shared the mist in hers, and nothing was said for several minutes. Pomp watched them from his sprawling position in the grass with as little comprehension, apparently, as a mastiff.

"Aunty," observed Taney, after a space, "what do you know about Esther that you are willing to tell me?"

IV.

"Young marster, ain't you and Miss Patty got done thinkin' about that girl yit?"

"No, and I don't think we shall, soon. Do you know where she is?"

"I could say I do, and ag'in I could say I don't," answered Naomi oracularly. "But I'll tell you the truth and say I do, same as I told you in the letter. But you know I can't tell you 'less she gives me permission first. I reckon you don't imagine she's done that."

"No," he answered shortly. "I should be very much surprised if she had. I can understand her turning a deaf ear to our appeals. I can understand why she prefers posing as a white person somewhere—as I believe she is doing—to living in our home, in her true character. I can also see how communicating with us might jeopardize her incognito. But, aunty, after all the good things I have heard of her, I can't understand why she should leave her old mother in a desolation like this."

The shot struck home, and the old woman was silent for a moment. "Marster, the lives we live are not always of our own choosin'. I reckon she's doing the best she knows how. The Lord may have given her only one talent, but I don't reckon she's gone and buried it in a napkin. I don't know, sonny boy, as I could expect *you* to understand what she's doin'. You are white, pure white. If you was white without being pure white—if there was just a little black in your veins, not enough to really change your thoughts and feelings, but just enough to allow pure whites to

call you 'nigger,' maybe you would understand."

Hallam understood more, perhaps, than Naomi suspected. It was just that minimum of black in Esther's constitution which troubled him and his mother, which made them anxious to get in touch with her, in order to make sure that the world was giving her a square deal. It really did make a difference, as Naomi had intimated, whether you regarded a person as colored, with three-quarters of her blood white, or whether you regarded her as white, with one-quarter of her blood black.

"When did you see her last?" he asked.

"Lemme think. About two years ago."

"Think again. Didn't you see her six months ago, when she came here to transfer some land?"

"Marster, what land you talkin' about, anyhow?" she demanded, with fine amazement. "Not that land Marse Bidwell give her, way back befo' the wah?"

"That's the land. Don't trifle with me, aunty. I may know more than you suspect."

Naomi took time to reflect.

"Marse Hal, I *did* see her about six

months ago, now that you done remind me of it. I'm gittin' so old my memory ain't no account at all any more; but 'tis kind of curious I'd forget *that*." She glanced out uneasily from under her gray eyebrows.

"She signed her name to the deed

as Esther Young," continued Taney. "Does that mean that she has married or merely that she has changed her name for a mask?"

"I reckon it must."

"Must what?"

"Why, mean one or t'other of them things, of course. Young marster, what's come over you? 'Pears to me like you's gittin' thick-headed."

"I can't accuse you of being thick-headed," he retorted, with a smile.

"Look heah, young marster, I've seen the time when I'd have boxed you' ears for sich sass."

She chuckled, darky-like,

at her joke, and waited for him to move next. But he, knowing that she had yielded all the information which she chose to, became silent. At this juncture, Pomp rose to a sitting posture, and looked up at Taney with an expansive grin.

"Marse Hollam, you done brung me



She snatched her hand away, and swiftly disappeared through the gate.

out any booze dis tam?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes, there's a quart bottle under my buggy seat. Go get it if you want it." He added to Naomi, with a mischievous look, as Pomp speedily vanished in the direction of the mansion: "Do you suppose it will hurt him?"

"Not a quart," she answered laconically. "A quart won't dampen *him* very fur down." As Pomp hove in sight again, with a beaming countenance, she called out sharply: "You lay that liquor down, boy, and ketch me a nice young rooster. I been chatterin' and chitterin' away here, and fergittin' that young marster got to have his dinner."

In a surprisingly short time she called Taney in to a dinner of fried chicken, hot biscuit, browned sweet potatoes, and coffee. The table was set for only one, and it was with the peculiar sensation of standing in his forefathers' shoes that he saw Naomi retire to the kitchen as soon as he was served, while Pomp, harnessed with an apron, took his stand behind his chair.

After dinner, Hallam walked over to the family graveyard—the "God's acre" of a former day. Four towering chinquapin oaks, set out by Hallam's great-grandfather, still guarded the sacred spot. A hundred summers and more had they seen come and go, many a birth of the pale, lunar sickle, thousands upon thousands of rosy dawns, and storms innumerable. They had looked down upon toddling babes, plucking uncertainly at the pale-blue periwinkle about their roots, and they had bowed their heads when the same babes, gray with age, were slowly and silently lowered into their narrow chambers. Through it all they had remained faithful to their trust, informing men from afar of the nature of the spot. But against the ravages of time they had no power. Frost and rain and heat, never hastening, never resting, had done their inexorable work, blackening the stones, obliterating the graven names, particle by particle, gnawing through the iron fence,

and spreading a matted coverlid of vines over all.

A profound quietude brooded over the inclosure. The tents of the dead are no place for life, and with the exception of a chameleon clinging to Bidwell Taney's massive shaft, no life was visible. Insects there were, no doubt, and a toad or a snake might have lain in the damp, green gloom beneath the low tent of vegetation. But the young man disturbed them not. He merely leaned upon the decrepit fence for a long time, with dull, abstracted eyes.

He continued his course to the river along what had once been a hard, white shell road, but was now only the line of least resistance through the tall weeds. At a sound, presently, on his left, he stopped, and, to his surprise, saw a pair of spotted ponies, attached to a neat basket phaeton and tied to a tree. The poverty-stricken neighborhood was not likely to afford such an equipage, and he wondered who the owner could be, and what business had brought him to this lonely spot. No one was in sight, however, and Taney passed on to the river.

Upon this stream his forefathers used to float their cotton and tobacco down to Savannah, with a crew of muscular darkies to pole the flatboat back again. Of the wharf, which had groaned under so many tons of this valuable merchandise, just one black, spongy timber remained, peeping out of the turbid water like the snout of an alligator, and affording a perch for a solitary mud turtle.

Dropping upon a patch of grass in the dense shade, after casting a wary glance around for a possible rattler or cottonmouth, he opened his mind, as it were, to the swarm of thoughts which had been assailing him all day. They were sad thoughts for the most part—pensive ones, at the best.

He was a success in life, measured by the world's standards; industry and a fair amount of talent had received their reward. In short, his adopted section had been kind to him. Yet at heart he still felt himself an alien in the North. All his family traditions

led back to a life very different from that which he was now living. He knew that this old life had been extinguished forever; that by no miracle could the Lares and Penates of the Southern planter be raked from the ashes of the Civil War and again established in their place above the broad family hearth. Indeed, could he have wrought the miracle, he would have withheld his hand—for the cornerstone of that society had been slavery. Yet that antebellum life was by no means all bad because of slavery. Its lordly breadth, its manifold responsibilities, its noble hospitalities, had made men whose names history would cherish, and one of these names was his own.

A breeze crisped the river. A bird note came from the opposite bank. By some sixth sense he became aware that the day was wheeling into its last quarter; and, glancing at his watch, he was astonished to find that he had been dreaming for nearly three hours. He leaped to his feet, and started back. As he repassed the clump of locusts, he noticed that the ponies were still there, and it occurred to him that they had been driven in there for concealment. But he had no time for speculation, as a threatening squadron of thunderheads was being rapidly marshaled into the zenith.

He reached the mansion just as the storm broke, blurring the landscape, rubbing the foliage of the trees the wrong way, and humming like a huge top. From a rustic chair on the veranda, he watched the torrential downpour. When it finally ceased, leaving a half-drowned earth, he turned to his horse and buggy, standing under the *porte-cochère*. Then, remembering that he had made no return to Naomi for the good dinner she had provided, he felt in his pocket to see if he had a dollar in change, and started off through the wet grass, on foot.

The black skirts of the storm still lay across the sky, producing an early dusk, and as he neared the cabin the gleam of a candle shone through the door. His foot was all but on the

threshold when he heard a strange voice—a white person's voice. He stepped forward cautiously, to get a view inside.

Naomi and Pomp were seated at the table. Before them was spread out a blue print of some kind. On the opposite side of the table, with her forefinger on the blue print, sat Coralie de la Pagerie. Jacqueline stood at her mother's side, idly looking on, and once opening her pretty mouth in a yawn.

"So, you will see," Coralie was saying, with her perfect teeth exposed in a smile, "that I can do justice to your daughter without doing injustice to your 'little missy's son,' as you call him."

V.

Eavesdropping was not to Taney's taste, and he noiselessly retired. Payment for his dinner could certainly wait in view of the embarrassment which his intrusion on that scene would create. For Madame de la Pagerie had certainly deceived him regarding her knowledge of Esther. If not, how should she have found out Esther's mother?

On his way back to Pin Oak, he did some close thinking; and on reaching the livery stable, he observed to the fat, frowsy proprietor:

"I came across a nobby turnout of spotted ponies and basket phaeton this afternoon. Anybody here in Pin Oak own them?"

"Hahdly," drawled the man complacently. "Them ponies belong to Lawyer King, of Savanner, and he keeps 'em right hyer in this stable, where he knows they'll git proper 'tention. A couple of ladies, though, druv 'em out this afternoon. I don't know who they be. Lawyer King's int'rusted in lands hyerabouts and does a lot of drivin' from this p'int. He's jist about got a boom started, too, by thunder. *This kentry's wakin' up.* Not that it ain't time. She's slept some, fer sertain. Friend, if we could jist git rid of the damned niggers, we'd be sailin' high in less'n five year. Fact!"

The black stable boy grinned at the uncomplimentary allusion to his race, and led the horse off with a song. Taney was tempted to ask the unsavory gentleman who would take care of his horses if he got rid of the "niggers." But he contented himself with wondering if the liveryman had any conception of the feelings which might be masked by such a smile as the stable boy's. Or did the smile really mask any feelings? Did it not merely express what it purported to—an abysmal indifference to opinion, a happy-go-lucky lack of pride, an infinite, racial good nature?

The longer Hallam pondered the events of the day, the more he was inclined to the belief that Madame de la Pagerie was not the innocent, unsophisticated person she appeared to be, and that she and King were of one mind, to put it mildly, on the question of selling her land for all it was worth. Her use of King's equipage, too, denoted an intimacy with her agent which Hallam by no means relished.

Yet he admonished himself not to forget that Madame de la Pagerie, in all probability, had no knowledge of King's color; and when he next called at the Pagerie dovecote, as he described the cottage in a letter to his mother, he was speedily induced to lay aside his suspicions of the lady's integrity.

In the first place, he could not imagine an adventuress living as quietly and unassumingly as these women lived. It was evident, as Colonel Dukelow had surmised, that they were poor. Pleasing and artistic as was their home, the casual scrutiny open to a visitor revealed the fact that the furnishings, with the exception of the piano, were inexpensive, not to say worn. Even the meal which he shared with them on this occasion was a frugal one, though, from the perfect cookery, dainty table appointments, and exquisite service, this fact was arrived at only by a cold-blooded analysis of the dishes.

Secondly, Jacqueline worked hard. However sweetly her voice may have

stolen back into the magnolia-scented court, it was called forth primarily for the benefit of her pupils, who paid a mere pittance for their lessons, as an examination of Colonel Dukelow revealed.

A thing occurred this very evening which went far toward convincing Hallam of Madame de la Pagerie's necessities, as well as of her simplicity. He and she were sitting in the court, as on the occasion of his former visit, while Jacqueline was busy as usual with a lesson.

"Meester Taney," she began, nibbling at a caraway cake to hide a faint flush, "my agent will ask you fifteen dollar the acre for my land, he says. He also says I cannot change the price without his permission. And I mus' not talk to you about it, even, he said. It is against professional—well, I forget the word. So you mus' say nothing to him about what I now spik to you. He would be very angry. But I would be almost willing to take ten dollar the acre if you would buy the land quick."

"Mr. King has no right to be angry with you," answered Taney, with a spirit which was doubtless spurred by his knowledge of the lawyer's mixed blood. "He is your servant, not you his, and you can fix any price that suits you."

Coralie shrugged her shoulders.

"Perhaps. But he iss a man, and I am only a woman. I would fear to make him angry. But about buying him quick—the land, I mean. Do you think it will take long for you to make up your min'?"

"You should understand," answered Taney kindly, "that I may not buy it at all. Unless it appears to me a good investment, I shall not want it, naturally. But if I do buy it the transaction can be closed in a short time—in a few weeks, at the outside."

"Ah, weeks!" she murmured, with a pensive smile. "Sometimes a week seems very long. I do not know if you haf ever—" She paused shyly. "No, I will not say it to a stranger."

"I trust you will consider me worthy

of your confidence," he observed suggestively.

"Worthy; oh, yes. But I must not say it. Besides, my daughter is coming—I hear her bidding her pupil good night—and I would not wish her to know that I have spoken to you so."

When Jacqueline appeared, Madame de la Pagerie, with a murmured "Excuse!" slipped into the house—to appear later with a bowl of claret sangaree. On his former visit, Taney had exchanged not more than a dozen words with the daughter of the house. She had impressed him as reserved, even cold, and did not at all square with his preconception of a Frenchwoman. But beautiful she certainly was. She was larger and taller than her mother, with a curious deliberation, both physical and mental, which somehow threw her mother into the shade, and created the impression that she was the leader of the two. Again—and this perhaps had its weight in an American's comparison of the pair—her patois was not nearly so pronounced as her mother's. In fact, her accent was no more marked than that of many a Southern girl whom Taney knew.

This, in connection with her fair skin and bronze hair, would have led one to believe, had it not been for her name, that her father was English or American, rather than French. Yet there was no question about her father having been a Frenchman of Martinique, where Jacqueline had lived until after her sixteenth year.

"Mr. Taney," said she, somewhat abruptly, after they had chatted a little, and the clinking of ice in the kitchen suggested Madame de la Pagerie's momentary return, "I want to give you a word of caution, even at the risk of creating an unfavorable impression of my mother. Before you buy this land in question, it would be well for you to make a thorough examination of the sulphur deposits on it. Do not too readily accept Mr. King's word for that."

She lifted a pair of level, unwavering hazel eyes to his, thus peculiarly

emphasizing her words. Taney's mind instantly leaped to the scene in Naomi's cabin.

"Your mother owns this land," he answered, with some embarrassment. "Of course, you don't mean that she would be a party to any misrepresentation. Yet Mr. King could hardly make any misrepresentation without her being a party to it."

"Remember my caution," said she, with a truly Pythian air, and smiled mysteriously.

A certain familiarity, even *camaraderie*, in her manner tempted Taney to ask her if she knew anything about Esther. Indeed, it was on his tongue to reveal his knowledge of her and her mother's visit at Naomi's cabin. But—fortunately, as he afterward concluded—Madame de la Pagerie's return put a period to this line of talk, and Jacqueline shot him a half-mischievous smile, as if detecting and enjoying his defeated purpose.

When a man has reached the age of thirty-eight without loving a woman; when he admits that love is all that poetry and philosophy have pronounced it to be, but declares that it is not an apple of which nature meant him to take a bite—when he has reached this conclusion, and settled down in it, like Tabby in her favorite cushion, he is apt to be disturbed when the touch of a girl's hand, received in a formal adieu, warms his palm for an hour afterward.

Hallam Taney, after leaving the Pageries, was distinctly disturbed. When he reflected that he had seen Jacqueline but twice, and that she was a foreigner, of unknown family, he was even provoked with himself. He decided, before going to sleep, that instead of tarrying in Savannah for a week, as he had planned, to look up the few old family friends still remaining, it would be wise for him to get this land deal off his hands at once, one way or the other, and head for New York and his club.

This was only Wednesday, however, and King, owing to an engagement in



*She remained standing for a moment, gazing fearlessly, if not defiantly, into the quad-
roon's malevolent eyes.*

Atlanta, had set Friday as the earliest day on which he could accompany Taney to Lindenwald and show him the exploratory borings in the sulphur beds. The next evening, therefore, Hallam, instead of sauntering around to the Pageries, as he had a secret inclination to do, remained at the house with Colonel Dukelow, and fought over the

battles of Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Kennesaw Mountain. Strangely enough, though, all the battlefields seemed to Taney to be paved with cool, red, damp bricks, and shaded by blooming magnolias. Therefore, while the colonel was deploying his troops for the defense of Atlanta, the young man took advantage of an interruption by a

neighbor to slip outdoors for a stroll. The brilliant Southern sky pulsed with beauty. It was too warm, however, for much walking, and Taney presently sat down in a little square, at the foot of a high-pedestaled statue of Kosciusko. Few people were stirring, and it was half an hour before a couple passed along the graveled walk edged by his bench. The man's duck suit attracted Hallam's eye first, and the next instant he recognized Richard King and Jacqueline de la Pagerie. To make his identification sure, he followed them, at a prudent distance, to the next light.

Then a heat not attributable to the night swept over him. In an instant, he was the hot-blooded Southron which he would have been had he never left his native soil. For a colored man was walking with a lady, strolling idly by her side, chatting with her as an equal, and once bringing from her lips a low peal of contralto laughter! The sound, sweet as it was, maddened Taney.

That Jacqueline should knowingly walk thus with a negro was inconceivable. There was, therefore, but one thing for a gentleman to do—defend her honor.

VI.

As Taney trailed the couple, he felt, in spite of his laudable motive, uncomfortably like a spy. Moreover, it troubled him that the girl should have accepted the society of a man whom she distrusted and evidently disliked. But women, he reflected, could not always select their companions; and, moreover, this had nothing to do with his present duty.

The couple paused at the Pagerie gate and talked a moment. In bidding her good night, King took Jacqueline's hand, and bent his head—as Hallam noted, with a smothered curse—as if to touch it with his lips. But the girl was too quick for him. She snatched her hand away, and swiftly disappeared through the gate.

Almost as swiftly, Taney ran forward, and before King had proceeded

ten paces farther he received a blow upon his ear—a slap, not a fisticuff. He swung about, with a startled exclamation, and reached for his hip pocket. But Hallam had foreseen just such a move, and thrust the muzzle of his own pistol into the man's face.

"Don't draw your gun," he commanded imperatively, "or I'll blow you into eternity. You infamous scoundrel!" he burst out fiercely. "What do you, a colored man, mean by taking such liberties with a lady?"

The quadroon did not answer. He merely breathed heavily and audibly through his dilated nostrils. As he stood there, limp and clammy from fright, stripped of his veneer of culture, and reduced to his animal elements, Taney marveled that he should ever have mistaken him for a white man.

"How do you suppose Mademoiselle de la Pagerie would feel if she knew the manner of man who had attempted to kiss her hand?" continued Hallam sternly. "She would consider herself dishonored. How do you suppose Madame de la Pagerie would feel, and how long do you suppose she would retain you as her agent? How long do you suppose any of your white clients would retain you if I should make this rascality of yours public tomorrow?"

The colored man drew forth a heavily scented handkerchief, and mopped his brow with shaking hands.

"Answer me!" commanded Taney. "Do you understand that many a man in my place would have shot you dead in your tracks?"

"Yes, sir," returned the other huskily. "I—I did not intend to offend—or to compromise Miss de la Pagerie. I would not do that for—for the world. I—I forgot myself."

"Forgot yourself! Do you mean to intimate that you *love* that young lady?" Taney's eyes flashed dangerously.

"No, no!" cried King. "She has been good to me, and I—I merely admire her. Not in the way you think," he added quickly, as Taney leaned

nearer. "I only admire her as I should—in gratitude—not as an equal. Please lower your pistol, sir!" he pleaded. "It might go off."

As Taney studied the face of the poor wretch, pallid and drawn with fear, his anger slowly evaporated and was replaced by pity. He became less the Southron, more the New Yorker. The man before him was three-quarters white. Three-quarters of his blood ran back to Poitiers, Crecy, Hastings, Bunker Hill! Yet, so far from resenting the cuff upon his ear, he had cowered like a field hand under the overseer's lash. Did the jungle blood in him vitiate the Anglo-Saxon? Or did he recognize, in an unreasoning, subconscious way, that behind the white man's blow stood church, state, and society, the whole complex organism called Civilization; the multitudinous weapons, both offensive and defensive, of a superior race? If so, his shrinking was somewhat excusable.

"King," said Taney, "I have no wish to harm you, personally or in a business way. If you will promise me never again to forget your position, I will promise you not to make this incident public, or to reveal your color to Madame de la Pagerie or her daughter."

"I promise," answered the lawyer. He lifted his head a little, drew a freer breath, and adjusted one of his cuffs.

"You understand I mean that you are to attempt no social intercourse of any kind with these people?"

King hesitated. He was evidently regaining his poise.

"As long as I handle Madame de la Pagerie's affairs I shall have to go to her house. She never comes to my office. She lives a very retired life. She never goes anywhere."

"Going to her house on business will be permissible, of course. But how does it happen that you are not in Atlanta to-night, as you told me you would be?"

"Imperative business prevented my going."

"I suppose you will be ready to go

out to Lindenwald with me to-morrow, as planned."

"I am very sorry, but it will be impossible. I have a case in the circuit court, at Atlanta, which I postponed by telegraph, but which I cannot postpone again. I expect to run up to-morrow night. I cannot, therefore, go out with you before Monday. Will that suit?"

Taney was about to reply that it would not—that he would be back in New York before Monday. But, after a pause, he answered that Monday would do. He had a suspicion that the lawyer was putting him off, that nothing would please him better—after this night's events—than for him—Taney—to abandon his project and go back North. King might then toss his promise to the winds.

That this was what he would do eventually, in any event, was borne in upon Taney as he walked homeward. He began to regret his compact, for it became plain to him that the only effective means of protecting the two women, after his departure, was to let them into the secret of King's origin. This he balked at doing, for he was not sophist enough to justify the breaking of a compact upon the suspicion that the other party to it might break it.

Nevertheless, he was determined to checkmate King in some manner, and it was the hope of stumbling upon the proper move to do this which took him to the cottage the next evening. At least, so he explained his visit to himself. As for the Pageries, they were evidently not sticklers for convention. They seemed to regard it as a perfectly natural thing that a stranger in the city, of good credentials, should seek entertainment at their home.

Yet, on greeting Jacqueline, Taney felt an embarrassment. The thing which he had clandestinely witnessed the night before troubled him. The sensation was like that which he would have felt had he inadvertently violated the privacy of her dressing room. She would have shrunk from him on account of his knowledge.

"Jack, sing someth'ing for Meester Taney," said Coralie.

She went back to replenish the empty cake plate. Taney had begun to notice, with some apprehension, that she was always finding little excuses for absenting herself. Meanwhile, Jacqueline came forward from her seat between two oleanders, like a nymph from her bower, and fetched her guitar. Without preliminary speech, she sang a little French troubadour song, as unconscious, apparently, of her listener as if he had been one of the goldfish in the pool. Yet he suspected—and thrilled on account of the suspicion—that she was endeavoring to look her loveliest.

"You speak French?" she asked, with a teasing glance, as she finished. He shook his head.

VII.

"Then I should explain," said she, "that that song is about a maid whose lover went forth to the holy wars and never came back again. Perhaps he was killed—the song does not say. Perhaps he fell in love with another maid, fairer than the little Provençal. Which you think?"

"Oh, let us say he was killed."

"Would you rather think of your sweetheart as dead, than false?" she asked, quite soberly.

"Certainly. Wouldn't you?"

She did not answer at once, and when she did it was in no tone of banter.

"For my own sake, yes. But for his sake—well, I am not so sure." She swept the strings softly with her fingers, as if to dismiss the subject, and asked: "When do you go to Lindenwald?"

"Next Monday."

"Just you and Mr. King?"

"Yes."

She lifted her lashes slowly and looked at him in her impersonal, disconcerting way.

"I should like it if mother and I could go along," said she.

"You may, of course. I should be pleased to have you go."

"Then speak to mother about it, please, before you leave. But do not mention my having suggested it."

"Very well. But why do you wish to go?" he asked, meeting her confidential attitude halfway.

She fondled her instrument for a moment, picking out a soft chord here and there. "I feel as if you might need me," she finally observed hesitantly. "Do you smile?"

"No. But do you expect me to take that quite seriously? Why should I need you?"

"I don't know why," she returned quietly. "I don't even know that you will need me. I said *might*."

His rencontre of the night before flashed over Taney, and he wondered if the quadrone had given her a garbled account of the event, suppressing the real cause of it.

"Has King ever intimated that he dislikes me?" he asked.

"No. But I believe that he does."

"When did you see him last? I have a reason for the question."

She widened her shrewd eyes inquiringly. "Last night. What has that to do with it?"

"Not since then?"

"No. Why do you make me say it twice? And I asked you what difference it makes?"

"You must allow me to be a little enigmatical, too," he observed, smiling.

She did not smile back. "I have no wish to be enigmatical. It is only that I must be. Already, I have said too much, I fear."

"Answer me just one question," he begged. "If King is a man whom you distrust and dislike, as you seem to, why does your mother employ him? Why do you let him come into your house on a social footing?"

She started slightly. "How do you know that he does that?" she demanded.

"I can only reply that I do know it."

She eyed him searchingly, almost suspiciously; and beautiful as were the teeth showing between the half-parted

lips they seemed to suggest that teeth were made to bite with.

"It is remarkable that you, a stranger, should have learned a thing that very few others know. Mr. King comes here because he chooses to, not because I choose it. The explanation is that all that mother and I have in this world is invested in this land, of which he himself holds a half interest. He is our master. We must not offend him."

Hallam glanced toward the kitchen, to make sure that the coast was clear.

"Miss de la Pagerie, you do not look to me like a woman who would submit to anybody's tyranny. Yet I accept your explanation. But this is a little game in which I may be able to take a hand myself. Only you must give me your confidence. Tell me first whether you know anything more about Esther Young, the former owner of this land, than what your mother has already told me."

"Mother knows as much about her as I," she answered—evasively, he thought; but there was no time to press the question.

"Was this land bought from her before the sulphur was discovered on it?"

"Yes," she answered swiftly, "but do not, by the Holy Virgin, betray that knowledge."

At this juncture, Coralie returned. Compared with the young couple's tête-à-tête, the ensuing conversation lacked piquancy. Taney, moreover, was preoccupied. He had not accomplished the purpose of his visit, but he had done something toward warning Jacqueline against King.

When he rose to go, at ten o'clock, Jacqueline cleverly manœuvred herself into her mother's accustomed place, and escorted him to the door. She even stepped outside into the little vestibule, pretending to look at the sky. Taney took it for a pretense, at least, and lingered a moment, hoping that she might have something further to say. He was not disappointed.

"You asked me why I wanted to go to Lindenwald," she began. Her voice was calm enough, but Hallam noticed

that an opal on her finger trembled in the rays of a street lamp. "I told you I might be needed. You do not believe me. Now, listen! Will you swear, upon your soul and your hopes of heaven, never to reveal what I am about to say?"

"If I can do it honorably—yes."

"Mr. King knows all about Esther. To prove it to you, he told me that she once saved you, when a baby, from being eaten alive by a wild dog. Is it true?"

"Yes," he answered, repressing the thrill he felt.

"She was all but killed herself, and her arm was so torn that she never regained the full use of it afterward?"

"Yes."

"And out of gratitude your grandfather left her a section of land when he died?"

"Yes."

Jacqueline glanced apprehensively behind her, as if she might have heard her mother's footsteps.

"Your grandfather, Bidwell Taney, also provided in his will that, in case his direct line of heirs failed, Lindenwald should revert to Esther."

Taney started. Certainly King, for purposes of his own, had been burrowing in the Tattnall County records.

"That is also true," he admitted.

"You represent the direct line—you are the only grandchild of Bidwell Taney, are you not?"

"I am."

"And unmarried?"

He nodded.

"Then, if you should die, the property would go to Esther?"

"Yes."

She paused again. He could hear her quick breathing.

"What goes to Esther, goes to Richard King. He gets his share."

Hallam glanced into her eyes, to make sure that she was in earnest. There was no doubt of it. For the first time, he saw her roused, and the sight gave him a peculiar sensation somewhere inside.

"But you don't mean, Miss de la Pagerie, that for the sake of his share

of an abandoned estate King would —" He paused for a word not too startling.

"I mean just that!" she replied decisively. "He would do anything to further his fortune. It is his one aim in life. That is the reason I despise him. And Lindenwald is more than an abandoned plantation to him. He expects great things of it. He expects a rehabilitation of this whole country. It is his hobby. I have heard him talk of it by the hour."

Taney gazed up into the phosphorescent, star-dusted vault. In his line of vision a wandering breeze playfully bent back the topmost spray of a tree, as a lover might tilt back the head of his sweetheart for a kiss.

"I thank you, Miss de la Pagerie," he observed. "But such things don't happen in real life—at least not in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the United States of America. In Martinique I have no doubt such things might happen. However, I shall be careful about being lured into any subterranean passages or marooned upon a desert island."

She did not join in his laugh. When he took her hand he retained it a trifle longer, perhaps, than he intended. He wanted to express his appreciation of her solicitude, but the right words did not come. They were either too frivolous or too serious.

The truth is, standing there in the hush of a sub-tropical night, with the languid exhalations of cape jessamine drifting into his nostrils, he was wary of his own judgment. Things of the workaday world had lost their just proportions. Big was little, little was big. So, preferring to err, if err he must, on the conservative side, he bade her good night and stepped out into the darkness of the night.

As he crossed the street immediately in front of the house, instead of going to the corner, some one slipped from behind a tree and receded with ghostly noiselessness down the turfy terrace. Suspecting the person to be one of the colored footpads who infested the city at that time, Taney drew his revolver

and passed on, glancing behind him every few yards to make sure that he was not being trailed.

With the last of his footfalls the narrow, sequestered street assumed its wonted quiet again. Only the tinkling chorus of the snowy tree cricket, punctuated by the bassoon stridulations of the katydids, was to be heard, and these sounds were only silence made audible.

Then it was that the figure whom Taney had disturbed emerged from behind the last tree in the row, stealthily crossed the street, and pulled the bell in the Pageries' gatepost. The front door opened cautiously, after some delay, and a flaring candle, held aloft, revealed Jacqueline's questioning face. The light at the same time revealed to her the face of Richard King, whom Taney supposed to be flying at this moment toward Atlanta, on the Central of Georgia's through train from Savannah.

"What is it?" asked Jacqueline coldly.

"I wish to speak to you and your mother," answered King in a tone which would brook no denial.

With the candle in one hand and her trailing skirts in the other, Jacqueline, without further parley, led the way back to the court, where her mother was still sitting. The latter's surprise over a ring at her bell at this hour gave way to a graver expression at sight of the lawyer's face. Nothing negroid marred its beauty to-night. In fact, an unusual haughtiness sat upon it; but there was a milky, venomous film over his eyes which boded little good to somebody.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded, as Coralie started to rise. "You sit there, Jack!" pointing to a chair. "I wish you both to get the full benefit of what I have to say."

Coralie cowered back in her chair. Not so Jacqueline. She remained standing for a moment, gazing fearlessly, if not defiantly, into the quad-roon's malevolent eyes. She was not the sheltered, timid child of a staid, Anglo-Saxon civilization. She had

been born and bred in a country where the elemental passions have play. Her own father had died at the hands of a band of assassins. Therefore, as she adjusted the lace of her corsage, her fingers played over—and brought into a more convenient position—the handle of a dagger which she had picked up on her way to the door. Then she sat down.

VIII.

"In the first place," began King with suppressed anger, "I have been waiting outside for two hours until your new friend should have made his adieu—his protracted adieu at the door."

"In other words, you were spying," cut in Jacqueline caustically.

"Call it what you please, miss."

"How did you know he was here?"

"I suspected it—he has shown a decided preference for this place, in spite of his aristocratic friends—and to verify my suspicions I came up the alley and peeped over the wall."

"I hope you didn't cut your hands," returned the girl with a taunting laugh that reddened his face.

"Be still, Jack!" commanded her mother. "But why did you not come in, Richard? You know you would have been welcome."

Had Taney been concealed behind one of the oleanders he would doubtless have noted, with no small degree of surprise, that Madame de la Pagerie did not now employ her pretty, Creole patois.

"Welcome to the grave!" exclaimed King, with twitching lips. "That is, unless I had got the drop on him first."

Both women stared in amazement.

"Are you crazy?" asked Jack. "Explain your meaning."

"I mean," he returned fiercely, "that this friend of yours, this son of Southern chivalry, who first came to you, my clients, instead of to me, as honor would have dictated—I mean that this man followed you and me home last night, like a thug, and after I had left you he assaulted me from behind."

"Assaulted you!" cried even the imperturbable girl.

"But why, Richard?" gasped Coralie.

"Because—because"—his voice thickened and choked with passion—"because I, a colored man, had presumed to walk on the street with a lady! Because I had forgotten my place, as he styled it!"

The face of the mother slowly turned a sickly gray. Jacqueline stiffened. A profound silence fell over the group. It was finally broken by the sound of soft sobbing from Coralie's direction.

"How—how could he ever have learned your color?" asked Jacqueline, in a low, unnatural voice.

King swallowed convulsively.

"Who can tell? But will murder out sooner than a drop of tainted blood, in this accursed land of negrophobes? I have never deluded myself that it would. I have always known that my origin was no secret in this town. How could it be? I never had a chance to efface my genealogy. I have never had a chance, like you, Esther de la Pagerie, to fly from this country, to bury myself in an obscure island for years, under a foreign flag, change my name by marriage, and pick up the customs and patois of another race. I would not have done it if I could. No! I know the futility of it. *You* did it. Yet, when love of country finally lured you back again, you went into hiding, like a fox. Fear was crueler to you than white men could have been. You dared not walk the streets in the light of day. Yet you were eventually recognized by me, and all your pains of exile would have been as naught had I not held my tongue."

"Not so loud, for the love of God!" pleaded Coralie, burying her face in her hands. "And do not mention that name of Esther again."

"Loud!" repeated King, with a bitter laugh. "I should be your true friend if I proclaimed your name from the housetops. You would have done better to follow my example. I have kept my place. Having gone nowhere

that a black man could not with propriety go, I have been called upon by no white man to show my lineage. I have advised you to do the same. I have advised you to accept your lot, to be content with what you are—for in the end that is what you will have to do. If not you, then your daughter. If not your daughter, then your daughter's daughter. Discovery will come.

You know that, as well as I, and that knowledge has been a sword of Damocles suspended above your head. You married a man, doubtless, who would have despised you had he known your ancestry."

"No!" interrupted Coralie, with spirit. "It is not so! I loved him, and I told him the truth."

"Perhaps," admitted the lawyer. "But Martinique is not America. You could not have done it here. Hence my advice. Not only have I advised you to get out of this tangle, but I have shown you the path. I have asked the hand of your daughter in marriage. She knows that I love her, and have long loved her. I could have given you and her a home as good as any white man's in this city. I would have gladly done it, for God knows that I, too, am lonely. Why did you refuse? Because, forsooth, white people would shun you. Tell me the difference between white people shunning you and your shunning them. You know, whatever your moral rights may be, that you have no social rights with

them. Social rights are given by men, not God. You would have had to go in by stealth, had you dared to go at all.

"Jack, there, slips into a few white homes, in a semiminal position—for no lady, no blueblood, in this Southern country works. She would prefer to live on crusts instead. And what does Jack get out of it? A few

white men and women address her as 'miss' or 'mademoiselle.' But what would they do if they discovered her blood? Slap her face and send her out the back door, just as they would a black wench whom they had caught pilfering silver. Faugh! You both submit, behind your masks, to more real degradation in a day than you would in a year as my wife and mother."

Exhausted by his impassioned harangue, he reached, with trembling hands, for the ladle in the bowl of sangaree, which still stood on the table. Neither of the women spoke at once. Coralie continued to weep un-

der her breath, but Jacqueline's face was as hard as flint.

"I seem to have heard much of this before," she observed finally. "And, to do you justice, I have never denied the truth of much of what you say. But what did you do, last night—what did you say, when Mr. Taney struck you?"

"What could I do?"

"Some men would have killed him."

"So would I, but the hound had already covered me with his pistol."



She hovered above him for a moment, uncertain, then touched his brow with her lips.

"What did you say, then?"

"I didn't betray you, if that is what you have in mind," he answered caustically. "Had I done so, I would have been your first and only caller this evening. I let him believe that you were ignorant of my cloven hoofs. I even promised him that I would keep away from here, except when on business."

"That was good and noble of you, Richard!" murmured Coralie.

"It was," assented Jacqueline. "But, so far as I am concerned," she added bitterly, "you could have told him the truth. You may tell him the truth at any hour or day that you next meet him."

"Oh, my darling child!" wailed Coralie. "Are all my sufferings, all my sacrifices, to go for nothing?"

"Dearie," answered the daughter more tenderly, "for what you have done in love I shall be grateful till the day I die, even though I may believe it was a mistaken love."

"I have done something for love, too, and without mistake, if I may venture to say so," observed King.

"Not so," returned Jack. "Your mistake was in assuming that a woman could love simply because she was loved."

"I do not ask for more than you can give. I should be content simply to live under the same roof with you, to ease your toil, to provide you with the necessities and some of the luxuries of life. That is all I ask. I should not ask a kiss, even a touch of your hand, unless you chose to bestow it."

"Even so, you ask more than you know," said Jacqueline wearily. "Let us not go into that again to-night. It is late, and I am tired—tired of life. I could happily lie down in a sleep from which there would be no awakening."

IX.

It was a dainty little nest of a room into which the two women retired. Through the latticed window the breath of magnolia drifted sweetly and languidly, like incense from the altar of

Morpheus. From the clump of trumpet creeper at the farther end of the court a mocking bird's minor night notes issued tenderly and intermittently, as if the singer might be dreaming of the little gray lady and four cinnamon-blotched, pale-blue eggs, not far away. But the incense brought no blessed oblivion to-night, and the occupants of the room were deaf to the music.

As Jacqueline let down her splendid hair—a lustrous bronze, without a wave to suggest the wool of her ancestors—her mother rocked to and fro in the anguish of despair. The daughter scarcely spoke; there was nothing which speech could change; but she helped her mother undress, and extinguished the tiny bronze night lamp, with its taper-like flame. Then she crept into her bed, as she fancied a wounded animal might creep into its lair to die.

Her grief was rather for her mother than for herself. The leveling to the ground of a castle of dreams which was reared in the sunny hours of one's adolescence is a crushing blow. Jacqueline knew the history of that castle—had heard it often from her mother's lips. As early as her fifteenth year, Coralie recognized, in spite of the privileges allowed her, the degradation of her position. With aspirations as high and pure as those of her mistress, she was socially and civilly only the equal of any other slave on the plantation. As regarded the future, she stood with her face to a stone wall. She resolved to scale it at the first opportunity, at any cost.

With her inheritance, the wall cracked. With the doom of the Confederacy, the wall fell. But freedom, she soon found, failed to free, in the high sense she had in mind. It made over neither black nor white. Their relative positions remained unchanged. To all intents and purposes, she was still a bondswoman. Then it was that she slipped away to Martinique.

Jacqueline had a hardness, a stoicism, which her mother not only lacked, but failed to comprehend. What life offered her, Jacqueline accepted—with-

out special gratitude, if the offering was good; without special resentment, if it was bad. In Martinique, she had been happy, in her grave, undemonstrative way; but upon her father's death and the poverty which ensued, she had readily acquiesced in her mother's proposal to return to America.

She had not found America as black as Coralie had painted it. In her secluded life, of course, she was not brought up against the realities, as her mother had been. She went her own way, the whites on one side of her, the blacks on the other; and both aliens, in her estimation. King was different, to be sure, but he made scarcely a ripple in the inner life of the Pageries.

To-night, however, Jacqueline's stoicism had been shaken. In spite of her impassioned speech to King, giving him permission to publish her origin to the world, she quailed at the thought. The truth was, a man had come into her life, the first man who had ever struck a chord in her cold bosom. That man was white, and she was—not!

"Jack, dear," observed Coralie, in a voice husky from sobbing, "what shall we do?"

"Just what we've always done—go on loving each other," answered the girl coolly, even lightly, in a tone which gave no hint of her leaden heart.

"But some day you won't have me to love," protested Coralie. "Some day I shall have to go, and it will be hard for me to leave you behind, all alone, in a friendless world."

"It will always be easy for me to follow you, darling," answered the girl, as if Coralie had spoken of an earthly voyage.

The mother shivered. It was not the first time that her child had hinted at self-destruction, and her calm, matter-of-fact allusion to it always filled the more mercurial Coralie with terror.

"Never speak of that again," she commanded. "I have not been good always, but I have my hopes of heaven, and there no suicide may hope to reach. Let us not talk of such things, however. Tell me, is there not some way

to escape from this stagnant pool into which our lives have fallen?"

"We might tear off our masks, as Richard calls them. That would stir the pool a little, even if it didn't lift us out. I would lose my pupils. Then we'd have to eat a little less, let Jacques out, to save the price of birdseed, and give Puss away. Still, all this would remove one objection to my selling myself to Richard, and that is to be considered." She laughed sardonically.

"Oh, my child," exclaimed Coralie hopelessly. "Have you a heart of stone, that you can laugh and make fun when my bosom is sore from weeping?"

"Why, motherly," exclaimed the girl, taking the other in her arms, "is it not as well to laugh as to cry? In the end, it makes no difference, and to laugh is pleasanter now."

At the railway station, the following Monday morning, Taney and the Pageries had about given up King. Taney was not surprised. When he informed the lawyer that he had invited the ladies to accompany them to Lindenwald, the latter's face had fallen. His objection to the presence of the ladies was plain, and Taney had half expected him to wriggle out of the engagement. However, after the train had been called for the last time, King rushed into the waiting room, flushed and perspiring, and the party barely had time to scramble aboard.

On reaching Pin Oak, it was with a curious sensation that Hallam observed King's spotted ponies and phaeton drawn up to the platform. The ladies moved toward this vehicle as if taking it for granted that it had been reserved for them, while a buggy was brought up by another dorky for the two men. A man in each vehicle to do the driving would certainly have been a more sensible division of the party, thought Hallam, and it would have been still pleasanter if they could have all ridden in one vehicle. He instinctively felt, however, that the present seating had been prearranged, and that he would be in a minority if he suggested a change. Moreover, he soon altered his

mind about a double-seated vehicle making the ride pleasanter, for King was taciturn, even sulky. Hallam felt like kicking him out of the buggy, at times; but, after all, he could not blame the man. No one readily forgets a cuff upon the ear.

Pomp met the party on what used to be the lawn. Hallam wondered whether the ladies would openly recognize him, or how they could avoid it should he address them by name. Pomp, however, merely greeted the party with a twitch of his tattered wool hat and a general "Goo' maw'nin'," to which the ladies replied with an equally impersonal salutation. Hallam was still in doubt whether or not there was an understanding between them.

The great front door and several of the windows of the mansion were open, and Pomp informed them that Naomi had arranged to serve dinner in the "big house" instead of in her cabin. Accordingly, all stepped inside, and deposited their rain coats and other impedimenta in the living room. This was a large apartment, nearly forty feet long and half as wide, and still contained some of its original furniture—several straight-backed, horsehair chairs of a severe and substantial mien, a davenport, table, and pier glass. The ceiling and wainscoting were of black walnut, rich and sombre.

Hallam and Jacqueline chanced to be left alone for a moment. All morning she had looked pale, Taney fancied, with an unnatural tension about her lips; and her agitation was now so palpable that he felt it would be impolite to ignore it any longer.

"It is nothing," she answered. "Just a little case of nerves. There is really nothing you can do—except to remember what I have told you."

Standing before him, as straight and supple as a young goddess, with her pale cheek toward him and her fine eyes fixed upon the distant landscape, she stirred in Hallam an almost irresistible impulse to speak out what was in his heart. He knew that he would be leaving in a day or two; mood and time might not match so well again.

"Miss de la Pagerie," he began—and paused at the tremor in his voice.

She affected not to notice the pause, did not even turn her head. But he saw her pupils suddenly widen and darken, as if from fright, until her eyes looked purple instead of hazel. Then Coralie and King reentered the room.

For a week it had rained daily, at or near the noon hour, and already the thunderheads were piling up in dark, threatening masses on the southern horizon. By wagon road it was nearly two miles to the sulphur boring, but a path across the fields, kept open by negro fishermen, reduced the distance by more than one-half. Knowing the swiftness with which these summer storms formed and broke, Hallam suggested that the ladies remain at the house, while he and King walked over. Jacqueline at once proclaimed her indifference to a wetting, but Coralie was evidently a little timid; and, King siding with Taney, the two men set off alone.

King, throwing off his sulkiness, now waxed loquacious on the possibilities of a new sulphur industry in America, and regretted that he himself had not enough capital to undertake it. Hallam, in spite of Jacqueline's recent caution, dismissed the matter of King's enmity from his mind, for there was little to fear in broad daylight from an arrant coward. Hence, he was thinking more of Jacqueline than of sulphur, as they walked along, and only came out of his dream when King, who was in the lead, halted, and addressed him.

"I am sorry now that we did not drive over," observed the lawyer. "It is wetter than I supposed."

The ground was certainly wet enough, owing to the recent downpours, and Taney's shoes oozed water at every step.

"I wanted you also to see the surface indications, a little farther on," continued King. "They are even more favorable than the boring. But I am positive that we cannot get there, at this rate, except by taking the road,

and the walking there is execrable." He paused a moment, with knitted brow. "The boring is only about forty rods ahead, right on this path. You could not miss it. Suppose you proceed by yourself, and examine the boring, while I go back after the horse and buggy, meeting you where the path joins the road."

Taney assented, and, after a glance at the heavens, suggested that the rain coats be thrown into the buggy.

"One word of caution," observed King, licking his lips nervously. "When you reach that big pecan tree yonder, the path forks. Take the right fork. The right, remember. The left runs into a bed of quicksand, and is dangerous. The boring crew lost a mule in it."

Taney moved forward, King turned in the opposite direction. But after a few paces the latter paused once more, and called back:

"You may find even the right fork a little boggy, owing to the recent rains; but it's perfectly safe. The machinery was hauled in that way, as you will notice by the wheel tracks."

With this parting advice, he stepped briskly off in the direction of the house. But his pace soon slackened, and within a few rods he stopped again, and glanced behind him. Taney had disappeared. The colored man remained motionless for perhaps a minute, and then began to slowly retrace his steps, in the direction of the boring. He moved noiselessly, gently pushing back the brambles and boughs which overhung the path, and just as gently releasing them.

X.

At the pecan tree of which he had spoken, King halted, removed his Panama hat, and wiped his beaded brow. His hand shook in the act, and, drawing a flask from his pocket, he drained half its contents at a draught. The stimulant abated his agitation but little, however. He glanced nervously along the path, in both directions. At a rustle, in the undergrowth—made by a rabbit, perhaps—he threw up his head

like a startled sheep. Once, too, he darted swiftly in Taney's direction; then, as suddenly changing his mind, he scuttled back to his post by the tree again. Meanwhile, his lips began to twitch and his face streamed with perspiration.

Suddenly he stiffened, like a man transfixed with a javelin. He listened. The cry came again.

"Help! Help!"

He set his teeth and clasped his hands to quell their painful trembling. He sat down; he leaped to his feet.

"Help! Help!"

Once it seemed as he were about to answer the call. He turned in that direction. Then he snatched out the flask and finished the whisky. It began to brace his unstrung body. He smiled, in a ghastly way, and with a hysterical laugh sent the bottle hurtling through the bushes. When the next appeal for help came, he calmly folded his arms, and said softly, yet aloud:

"There is no help for you, Hallam Taney! Go down, down, down, and rot with that mule!"

Yet he triumphed too soon. Somewhere in the well-nigh impenetrable growth all around a great commotion was suddenly set up, a breaking of limbs and trampling of dried weed stalks, sounds such as would accompany the hurried passage of a large animal. A panic seized the guilty wretch, and he quickly sought cover, half prepared to see the devil himself. But it was only Pomp who, a moment later, burst out of the thicket into the path, not twenty feet away. He halted an instant, to get his bearings, and then, dropping the ancient fowling piece which he carried, the big fellow dashed in the direction of the boring.

The quadron, by this time in a pitiable state of terror, yet nerved a little by his desperate situation, emerged from his hiding place, with a pistol in his grasp. But a pistol is a most uncertain weapon, as he well knew, in unskilled hands, especially when they are shaking as violently as were his; and, at the sight of Pompey's shotgun,

he thrust the pistol into his pocket, and seized the larger weapon.

It requires no great amount of courage, it would seem—assuming that one has murder in his heart—to shoot in the back, from ambush, with as deadly and certain a weapon as a shotgun, a man who is struggling in a mire of quicksand to save another man. Yet the poltroon was unequal to the task, and with a whimper of despair he dropped the gun and fled down the path.

He might yet have returned to the mansion, explained his errand to the ladies, and got his buggy, without exciting suspicion. That is, he might have done so had he possessed the requisite coolness. As it was, he could no more have faced Coralie and Jacqueline than he could have murdered Pompey. Escape was his only thought, and he set off at full speed for an old canal, which had formerly conducted water from the river to a rice field.

At sight of a pile of barrels which had been dumped into the big ditch, he halted. They had contained the sulphur and sulphur ore which had been used in "salting" the hole he had made in the ground, for the purpose of hoodwinking Hallam Taney or some other victim. His first impulse was to crawl into one of them. But Pomp knew all about these barrels—had helped, in fact, to roll them here—and the black rascal, stimulated by the offer of a reward, would doubtless be the first to lead a posse to this spot. So the fugitive followed the canal half a mile farther, until he spied a tangle of wild grapevines underneath the bank, whereupon he sprang down and crept into the grotto-like interior.

Here he soon began to collect his wits. After all, nothing could be proved against him. Although he had instructed Taney to take the right fork of the path, he could swear that he had said left. Taney himself might even be made to believe that he had misunderstood. Explaining his failure to return for the buggy would scarcely be more difficult. He could say that after leaving Taney he had decided to test

the footpath leading to the surface indications; that he had mired down, or sprained his ankle, or been overcome with the heat.

It would take nerve, of course; but his nerve was returning, and with a heart full of hope he began to rehearse his story. In his absorption, he was oblivious of a peculiar, shrill tinkle, which had been several times repeated—a tinkle which at any other time would have blanched his cheek. But, finally, like one still drowsy from slumber, he became conscious that he was looking into the beady, glittering eyes of a diamond-backed rattler, coiled almost between his feet.

Even yet the scaly king of the jungle would have permitted the two-legged intruder to retire unharmed. But the man, paralyzed with fright and scarcely conscious of the act, drew his pistol, and fired. The bullet may or may not have struck its mark; anyhow, the reptile struck back, as quick as thought, and the next instant King was gazing, with fascinated eyes, at a pin puncture on the back of his hand.

He emitted one maniacal shriek. But terror had pushed him too far. He now turned and stood at bay. Quite calmly, he drew a jackknife from his pocket, and slashed the back of his hand to ribbons, after the approved fashion in the South, in case of a rattler's bite. He next squeezed and sucked from the wound as much blood as he could. Then he started for the house on a run.

Taney, a little pale, but not otherwise looking the worse for his experience in the quicksand, was sitting in an easy-chair on the veranda, with a sympathizing woman on either side of him, and Pomp on the steps. King's strange delay had a deep significance for at least two of the group, and they both started a little, as King, pale but composed, approached the steps.

"I have been bitten by a rattlesnake," he announced quietly. "Some one will please drive to Pin Oak at once, and telegraph for a doctor. A train leaves the city at one o'clock."



He bent close enough to see that her lids were downcast and her lips set.

Coralie grew limp in her chair. Jacqueline sprang to her feet, and exclaimed: "Give me your handkerchief for a tourniquet!"

In spite of the fact that the serpent's victim had in all probability plotted to take his life, Hallam felt a thrill of admiration for the fellow's coolness. Tearing a sheet of paper from his notebook, he wrote a tele-

gram, to be delivered to any doctor immediately accessible. Pompey, as he ran to hitch up the horse, shouted out the news to Naomi, and in a very short time she came, panting, up with a cherished bottle of brandy—drawn from a secret niche, which Pomp had spent days in hunting for.

Hallam was a little skeptical of the alcohol's virtue, but in addition to be-

ing a proverbial remedy in the South for snake bite, it was the only one at hand. The patient, therefore, disposed of the quart in a very short time, after which a bed was made up for him on the davenport. Then came the long and trying wait for the physician.

The stricken man's sufferings were apparently not great. His arm, swollen badly, pained him some, and he was subject to occasional attacks of nausea. But, for the most part, he lay like one under the influence of a powerful opiate, his eyes half closed, his face expressionless. When spoken to, he answered only half coherently.

Naomi, who had been a famous nurse in her time, assumed charge of the case. But as the hours passed by the others took their turn in relieving her. Taney chanced to be on duty when the sick man opened his eyes and muttered something.

"What is it?" asked the watcher, bending nearer.

"I want half of my property to go to my mother," said King, with difficulty. "She lives in Charlotte—Charlotte, North Carolina. Her name is Lucy Chamberlain. Don't forget—Lucy Chamberlain."

He paused from exhaustion, and Taney handed him a glass of water.

"Anything else?" he asked encouragingly.

"I want the other half to go to Jacqueline de la Pagerie!" came the answer.

Hallam did not speak for a moment. He had a queer, shivery sensation about his spine.

"Very well," he answered. "You may rest in the assurance that I shall carry out your bequests."

XI.

When Pomp failed to return by four o'clock, it was evident that no doctor had received the telegram in time to get off on the one o'clock train. No other train left Savannah until six, which meant that no physician would reach Lindenwald before nine. That the patient would last this long was

very doubtful. The toxic juice from the serpent's fang was assailing the strongholds of the body, one after the other; and it, in absence of relief, must speedily surrender.

What were Jacqueline de la Pagerie's thoughts as she sat beside the dying man? In a little while the only person in the world, outside of her family, who held the dark secret of her mixed blood, would soon have crossed the River of the Dead. No Stygian wind would ever bear back to the land of the living one syllable of his voice. No more would she tremble lest she anger him. Never again would she submit to the touch of a hand she loathed. For the last time, in the small hours of the night, had a subtle tempter paused at the verge of her wakeful couch and tried, with fair promises, to lure her into an alliance which was odious to every fibre of her being.

Was this all? The man outside, the white man, who had so suddenly stepped into the shadowy sphere of her existence—what about him? Her heart knocked upon her bosom. Deceive herself she might, but not that organ within. A half-guilty light shone from her eyes.

The room was very quiet. Twilight, not yet visible outside, was already creeping into the corners, was beginning to veil the carving on the farthest-most panels of the ceiling. This room, now so calmly waiting the noiseless tread of Death, had once rung with laughter—had once trembled under the feet of dancers. Her grandfather, her mother's father, might have been one of the gay company! It was by no means impossible. Would he have laughed then, or ever again, had he foreseen this hour, when a child of Light and a child of Darkness were yearning for each other, with an abyss between them which no love could span?

Or could it? Once more her eyes darkled. She pressed her hands to her face, and murmured softly: "Oh, my God! Show me the way!"

King made a sound, and she bent

over him. He had last spoken, some thirty minutes before, to ask if the doctor had come. She supposed he now wished to repeat the question. His swollen lips moved soundlessly for a moment.

"I—I die in the house where my forefathers served!" he murmured thickly.

She nodded. She saw that dissolution was imminent. But its approach did not subdue her, hardly softened her. On the contrary, she was thinking what a little thing, what an unimportant thing, it was to die. A few hours since, this man was; a few hours hence, and he would be not. The margin between was a drop of pellucid fluid from the tooth of a crawling beast. And King would know no change different from that which came to him every night, when he fell asleep. So she tranquilly decided to keep him company until the grim Presence should relieve her.

Presently, the dying man signaled her with his eyes, and again she bent over him.

"I go!" he whispered. "Will you give me a kiss—to ease me into eternity?"

She hovered above him for a moment, uncertain, then touched his brow with her lips.

"As a cup of water to the thirsty, Richard," said she, and for the first time her eyes filled.

He fumbled for her hand blindly, and found it; but a moment later his grasp relaxed, his fingers opened. Jacqueline moved, with her light, firm tread, to the door.

"He is dead, Mr. Taney," she announced quietly.

Without waiting for an answer, she passed down the wide hall, toward the kitchen, where she found her mother. At the intelligence, momentarily expected, Coralie kissed her daughter.

"Free—we are free!" she murmured.

Old Naomi was sitting in a chair, with a pan of potatoes in her lap. She glanced from daughter to granddaughter, at the words, with an ancient wisdom in her eyes.

"Death frees only the dead," she mumbled.

"This has been a most grewsome day," observed Hallam to Jacqueline.

They were walking in what once, on a May day during the Mexican War, had been christened "Diana's Court"—an oblong space, inclosed by the columnar trunks of ancient oaks. Through their interlacing tops, the moon was now dropping broken and splintered shafts of light, making patches here and there which glowed like foxfire.

"I was unstrung somewhat by my experience this forenoon," he continued. "On top of that came poor King's horrible mishap. The two combined have caused my mind to run on the curse which was pronounced against this place, nearly a hundred and twenty years ago, by an old negress who was reputed to be a sorceress. It is a carefully preserved tradition in our family, but I won't go into the story now. It is not cheerful. But I started out to express to you, Miss de la Pagerie, my admiration of the manner in which you have conducted yourself to-day, under very trying circumstances."

She did not answer at once, but after a little said, with her shrewd smile: "I told you that you might need me."

"You little anticipated, I presume, in just what manner you would be of service."

"No. Yet if a seer had told me that I should sit by a dying man," she added quickly, "I should have had no doubt that he meant you."

It was the first word she had dropped which might be construed as connecting King with the quicksand adventure, and Taney decided, for the present, not to enlighten her. In his own mind, there was no doubt of King's intention. Nor did he wish to tell her yet of King's bequest.

At the farther end of the court, four clustered trunks formed the "Throne," as it used to be called. A part of the circular seat still remained, and upon this the couple sat down.

"It was on this identical seat," explained Hallam, "that my father asked

for my mother's hand. I left here, you know, when an infant. The first time I ever sat on this seat, to remember it, was some eighteen years ago. The place was then just what it is now—a ruin. When I pictured to myself what it must have been when my dear mother accepted my father's love, my heart swelled. I think it is rather difficult for a son to think of his mother as having ever been a timid, blushing girl. He is inclined to think of her as having always been the wise, tender, protecting angel which she was when he first came to know her."

"With a woman it is different," observed Jacqueline. "It is easy for me to picture my mother as a little girl. Sometimes I think of her yet as such."

"I suppose so. Perhaps the great change which has taken place in my mother's environment has something to do with it in my case. You can form little idea from this desolation of what antebellum life was here in the South. In some respects, it was the most ideal and picturesque civilization which the world has ever seen. Yet I would not have it back again at the price."

"Of slavery?"

"Yes. Slavery's train of evils was a long one, but the worst, in my opinion, was the one of which you hear the least. A race of poor creatures was born into the world for which there was absolutely no place. There was a place for the white man and a place for the black man; but the man between, who was neither, hung in space—especially after the war. White he could not be, black he would not be."

"I say 'man,' but it was the woman who was in the most pitiable plight—as she is yet, for that matter. No matter how nearly white she might come to be, she was as far as ever from being white—if you will permit the paradox. Nor could it be otherwise, for she was a child of sin. She had no institutional society to keep her, by precept and example, in the straight and narrow way. Saddest of all, she had no home, unless you designate a roof and bed such."

Jacqueline offered no comment. In

the semigloom, her fair skin made her face faintly visible, and Taney glanced toward it occasionally. It was very still. No bark of dog, no lowing of cattle, no distant human voice. But presently he heard a slight inrush of breath, as if his companion had shivered.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"Oh, no." Her voice was matter of fact enough.

"Perhaps you are tired, and would like to retire."

"No."

"Are you willing to listen to something else which I have to tell you?"

It was his tone, not his words, which was significant. She inclined her head slightly, in answer, so that a moonbeam splashed in the tangle of bronze hair.

"I did not bring you out here to talk of the past, but of the future. Jacqueline, I wanted to be alone with you tonight in order that I might tell you that I love you—that I might ask you to become my wife."

She not replying, he bent close enough to see that her lids were downcast and her lips set.

"I know that I am presumptuous. I know you are thinking how short has been our acquaintance, and how unconventionally it came about. But you know who I am, what my family is, and has been. Is it not so?"

She ceased picking at the fragment of bark in her lap, and lifted her eyes to his.

"I was thinking how little you know of my family," she answered simply.

"I know you and your mother, which is all I want to know, and all that I need to know," he returned eagerly. "As to the shortness of our acquaintance, I am not a boy. I am a man of thirty-eight, and you are the first woman I ever loved. I loved you, I think, the moment I first laid my eyes upon you. Now, have I misjudged you in thinking that possibly you might return my affection? Not wholly yet, perhaps—I could hardly expect that—but in sufficient measure to give me a little hope?"

He bent closer, but did not touch her.

Her silence was impenetrable. Her face was like an alabaster mask. Yet through the mask shone a pair of strangely luminous eyes.

"Would you like a little more time before you make any kind of an answer?" he asked gently.

He laid his tremulous hand upon both of hers, clasped together in her lap. They were not trembling, but they were icy cold.

"Do you love me a little—enough not to make my touch a profanation?" he continued persuasively.

Again her beautiful face was slowly uplifted to his. Her eyes shimmered tenderly. There was nothing of the coquette about her, and with the fearlessness of every true woman, when her heart strikes its hour, she answered:

"Hallam, I love you more than my poor tongue can ever tell."

He was dumb and motionless a moment under the potent spell of her words; then he leaned forward to kiss her. But she interposed her hand between their lips.

"Not yet!" she whispered.

"To-morrow, then?"

"Perhaps."

"Early?" he asked, with a boyish laugh.

"Yes—when you first see me."

Before he could answer, the sound of wheels reached their ears.

XII.

"There's Pomp!" exclaimed Hallam. "We'd better go see if he has a doctor with him."

"You go," said she. "I'll remain here a little longer, and then go to bed. Please do not come back."

He pressed her hand happily, and then crossed the dark court. Pomp's seven hours' wait in Pin Oak, added to the possession of a silver dollar which Taney had dropped into his palm on starting, had proved too severe a strain upon his virtue. He was now redolent with alcohol, and somewhat unsteady on his legs. But he had brought the physician through in rec-

ord time, and when he heard of King's demise he flung himself on the grass and wept like a child.

Taney was up until eleven o'clock, discussing King's case with the doctor and making arrangements for the latter's entertainment that night. But he did not glimpse Jacqueline again. Sleep came reluctantly to his excited brain. He looked at his watch once and saw that it was two o'clock. Nevertheless, he was up at five in the morning. His intention was to lie in wait for Jacqueline at the foot of the broad, winding stairway, where doubtless many another lover, in the long, long ago, had waylaid his darling and rifled her lips of their sweets.

To his astonishment, he met Coralie in the downstairs hall.

"Oh, Mr. Taney, I cannot find Jacqueline!" she exclaimed anxiously. "She rose to get a drink of water half an hour ago, and has not return'."

"We'll find the runaway," answered Hallam gayly. "She's doubtless gathering dew from rose petals, to make a love potion for somebody."

His mind turned to the secluded spot in which he had left Jacqueline the night before. Naturally, in view of her promise, he would have preferred to come upon her alone. But the troubled mother could not well be put aside, and the two set off together. Taney decided to claim his reward, in spite of Coralie's presence, and then formally to ask her for her daughter's hand.

Jacqueline was in the court—they glimpsed her white garments from afar. She was half lying, half kneeling, with her head upon the bench—cold and dead. One hand clutched stiffly her lace handkerchief, which was somewhat stained with the dark contents of a phial concealed within its folds. In the other hand was a bit of paper. Upon her tawny, loosely coiled hair there lay a brown leaf from the oak above.

It seemed to Hallam afterward as if he must have stood for hours, staring with glazed eyes at the fair ruin before him, and yet failing to connect it with

himself. Coralie must have screamed, too, must have darted past him—indeed, he vaguely remembered something of the kind. But when he came out of his trance, the mother was gently kissing the girl's cheek, stroking her hair, smoothing her gown. Then he, too, knelt and pressed a kiss upon the cold, unyielding cheek.

"She told me last night that I might do it when I first saw her this morning," he explained. But it was not himself that spoke. It was an actor in some grisly tragedy, repeating the words he had learned by rote.

Coralie took the paper from the unresisting fingers. "Read it," said she. And when he could command his voice sufficiently, Hallam read:

Do not mourn for me. I have chosen the pleasanter path. Death is sweeter than life. If I seem weak, Hallam, be charitable. If I seem selfish, mother, forgive. You can now do what I could not—go home with Hallam.

"What does she mean by the last?" asked Taney, when the iron band about his throat had relaxed enough to permit speech.

Coralie knew well. She could go back with Hallam as Esther. It was Jacqueline's last appeal for her mother to reveal the truth. Yet with the white man's kiss scarcely dry upon her daughter's cheek, Coralie shrank, body and soul, from the confession.

"Why should *she* not go with me, too?" asked Hallam again.

The mother gazed long upon the dead face, beautiful even in death. Then, with a shudder, she pushed up her own loose sleeve, and held out her bare, white arm. A deep scar marred it from wrist to elbow.

For a moment, Hallam gazed incomprehendingly. Then, with a star-

tled cry, he leaned limply against the trunk of the tree.

"Esther!" he whispered.

She bowed her head.

Hallam covered his face with his hands. The woman waited, as one waits for a worshiper to finish his prayer. At last, he addressed her again, this time calmly, as true men do after the lead of grief has sounded the deep of their souls.

"Esther, would you have any objections to her being laid to rest over there, in our family graveyard?"

"Perhaps, not feeling herself free to marry you, she would not feel herself free to lie with your ancestors," answered Esther.

He shook his head dissentingly.

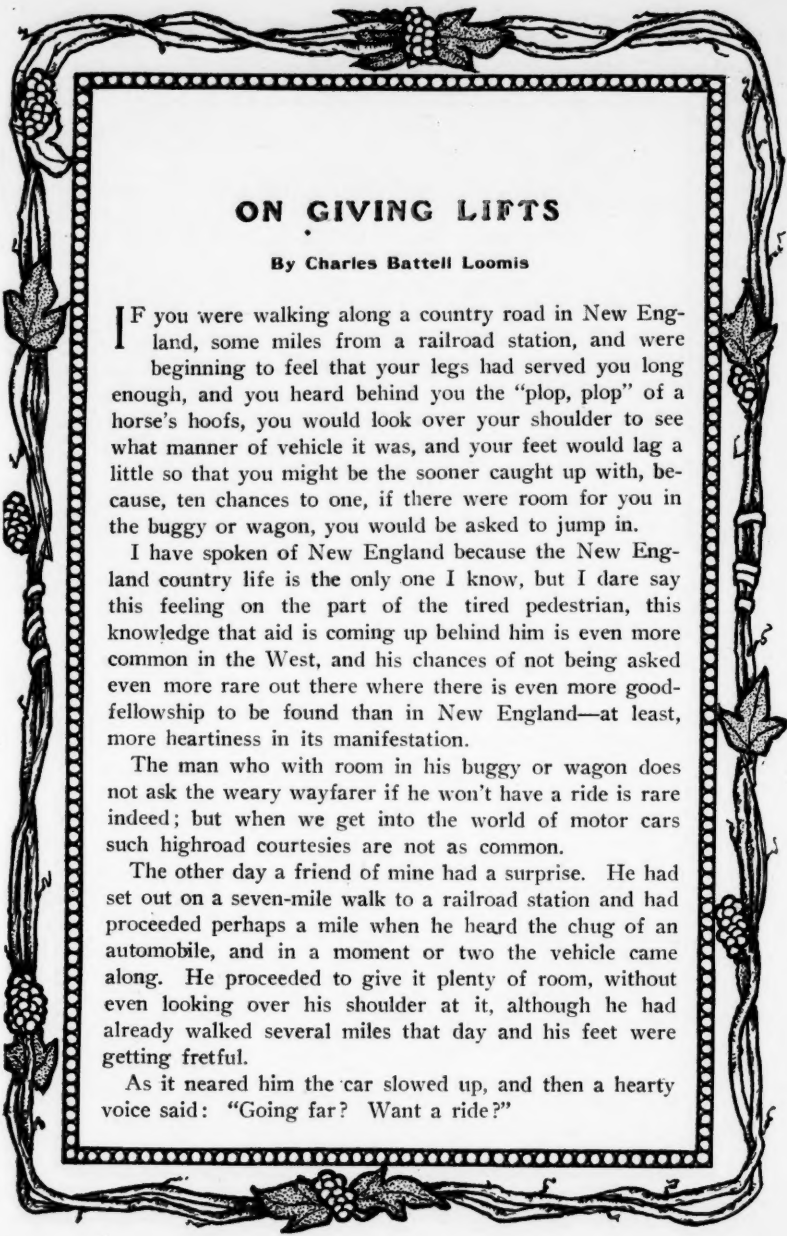
"You have heard of Uncle Peter—old black Uncle Peter? *He* lies over there, and the little headstone says—I read it only a few days ago—'Faithful unto death.' Was she not faithful, too—faithful unto death? She shall lie over there. Some day, perhaps, I shall lie at her side. If so, I shall not be ashamed to rise therefrom on Resurrection Morn. Few or none will come to lay a flower upon our graves, but what behooves that? Every spring the wild rose will spread her sweet pillow of bloom, and we shall sleep none the less soundly for the matted shroud which nature shall weave above us."

He gazed, long and steadily, at a wisp of vapor high in the heavens.

"Mother will be glad to have you back again, Esther. She will rest better at night for knowing that you are near. And when she sees that scar upon your arm, remembering that it was made by teeth meant for her little boy, I'm sure she'll kiss it."

He smiled through misty eyes.



A decorative border of grapevines with clusters of grapes and leaves frames the entire page. Inside this border is a rectangular frame with a dotted pattern. The title and author's name are centered within this dotted frame.

ON GIVING LIFTS

By Charles Battell Loomis

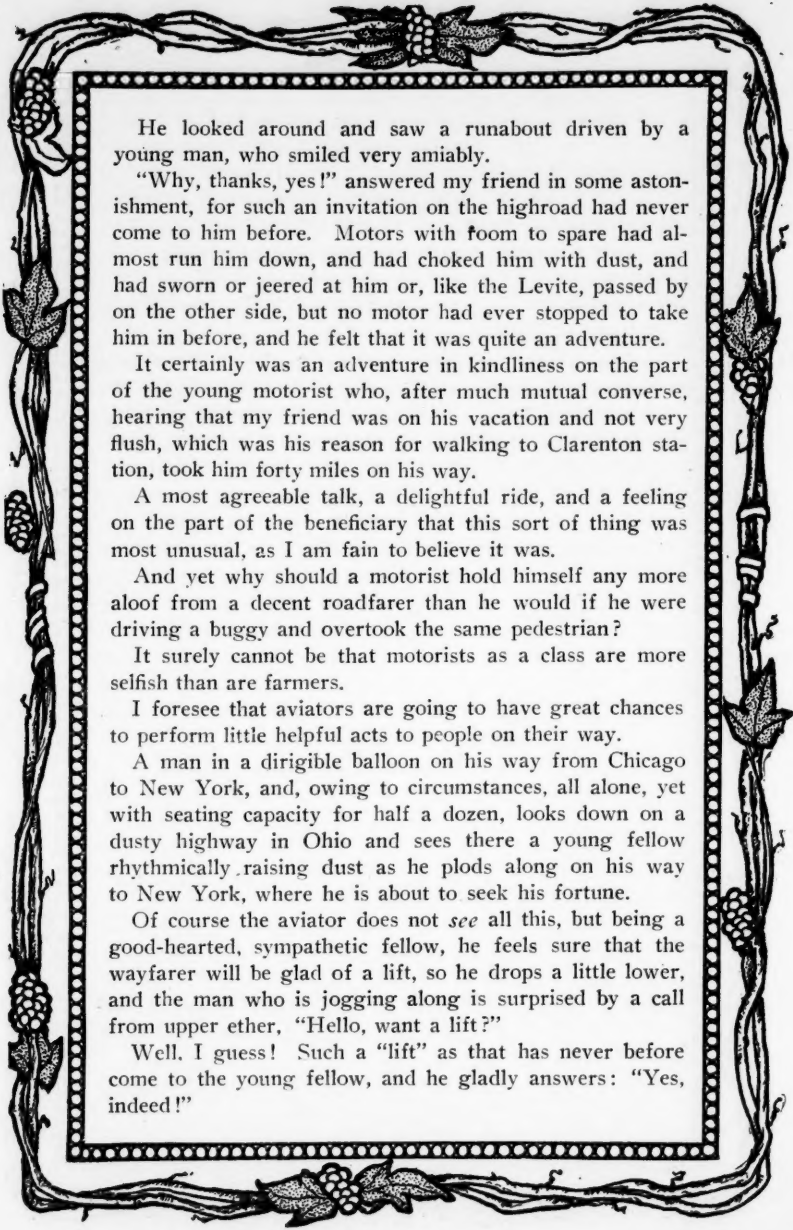
IF you were walking along a country road in New England, some miles from a railroad station, and were beginning to feel that your legs had served you long enough, and you heard behind you the "plop, plop" of a horse's hoofs, you would look over your shoulder to see what manner of vehicle it was, and your feet would lag a little so that you might be the sooner caught up with, because, ten chances to one, if there were room for you in the buggy or wagon, you would be asked to jump in.

I have spoken of New England because the New England country life is the only one I know, but I dare say this feeling on the part of the tired pedestrian, this knowledge that aid is coming up behind him is even more common in the West, and his chances of not being asked even more rare out there where there is even more good-fellowship to be found than in New England—at least, more heartiness in its manifestation.

The man who with room in his buggy or wagon does not ask the weary wayfarer if he won't have a ride is rare indeed; but when we get into the world of motor cars such highroad courtesies are not as common.

The other day a friend of mine had a surprise. He had set out on a seven-mile walk to a railroad station and had proceeded perhaps a mile when he heard the chug of an automobile, and in a moment or two the vehicle came along. He proceeded to give it plenty of room, without even looking over his shoulder at it, although he had already walked several miles that day and his feet were getting fretful.

As it neared him the car slowed up, and then a hearty voice said: "Going far? Want a ride?"



He looked around and saw a runabout driven by a young man, who smiled very amiably.

"Why, thanks, yes!" answered my friend in some astonishment, for such an invitation on the highroad had never come to him before. Motors with foom to spare had almost run him down, and had choked him with dust, and had sworn or jeered at him or, like the Levite, passed by on the other side, but no motor had ever stopped to take him in before, and he felt that it was quite an adventure.

It certainly was an adventure in kindness on the part of the young motorist who, after much mutual converse, hearing that my friend was on his vacation and not very flush, which was his reason for walking to Clarenton station, took him forty miles on his way.

A most agreeable talk, a delightful ride, and a feeling on the part of the beneficiary that this sort of thing was most unusual, as I am fain to believe it was.

And yet why should a motorist hold himself any more aloof from a decent roadfarer than he would if he were driving a buggy and overtook the same pedestrian?

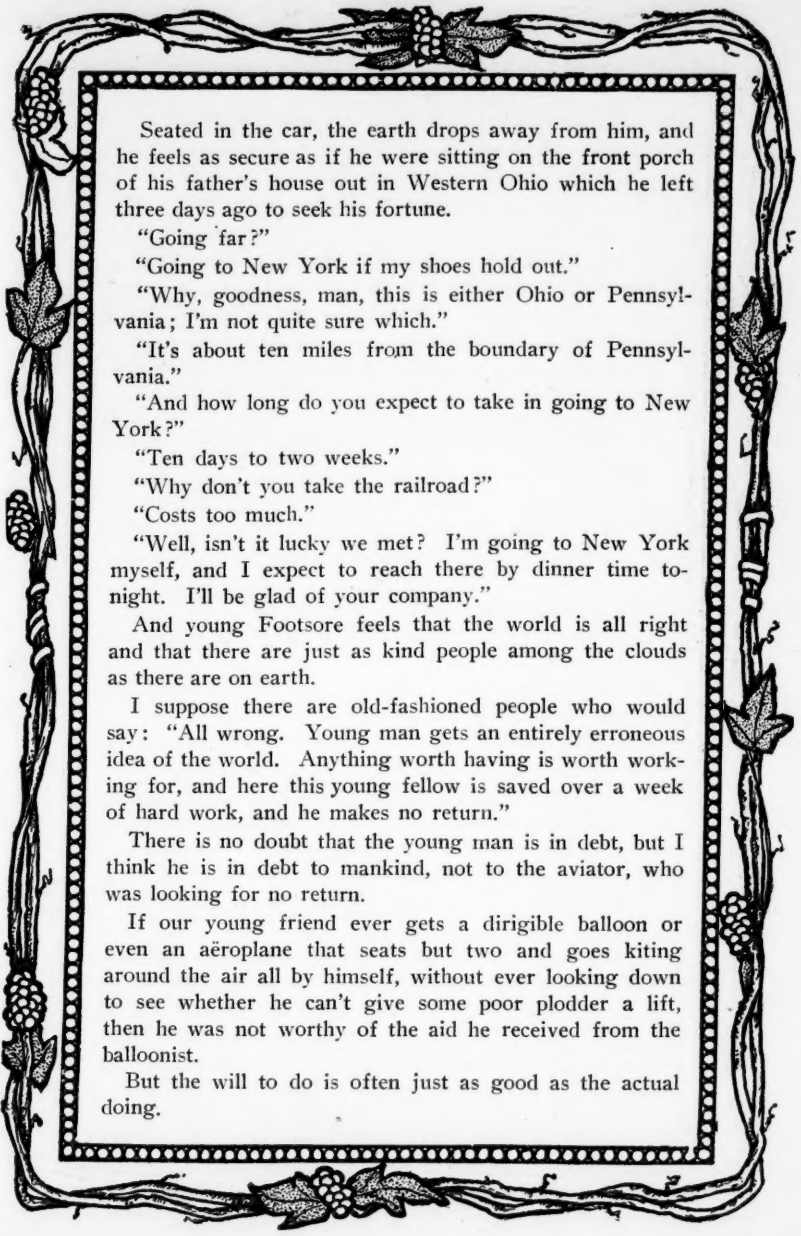
It surely cannot be that motorists as a class are more selfish than are farmers.

I foresee that aviators are going to have great chances to perform little helpful acts to people on their way.

A man in a dirigible balloon on his way from Chicago to New York, and, owing to circumstances, all alone, yet with seating capacity for half a dozen, looks down on a dusty highway in Ohio and sees there a young fellow rhythmically raising dust as he plods along on his way to New York, where he is about to seek his fortune.

Of course the aviator does not *see* all this, but being a good-hearted, sympathetic fellow, he feels sure that the wayfarer will be glad of a lift, so he drops a little lower, and the man who is jogging along is surprised by a call from upper ether, "Hello, want a lift?"

Well, I guess! Such a "lift" as that has never before come to the young fellow, and he gladly answers: "Yes, indeed!"



Seated in the car, the earth drops away from him, and he feels as secure as if he were sitting on the front porch of his father's house out in Western Ohio which he left three days ago to seek his fortune.

"Going far?"

"Going to New York if my shoes hold out."

"Why, goodness, man, this is either Ohio or Pennsylvania; I'm not quite sure which."

"It's about ten miles from the boundary of Pennsylvania."

"And how long do you expect to take in going to New York?"

"Ten days to two weeks."

"Why don't you take the railroad?"

"Costs too much."

"Well, isn't it lucky we met? I'm going to New York myself, and I expect to reach there by dinner time to-night. I'll be glad of your company."

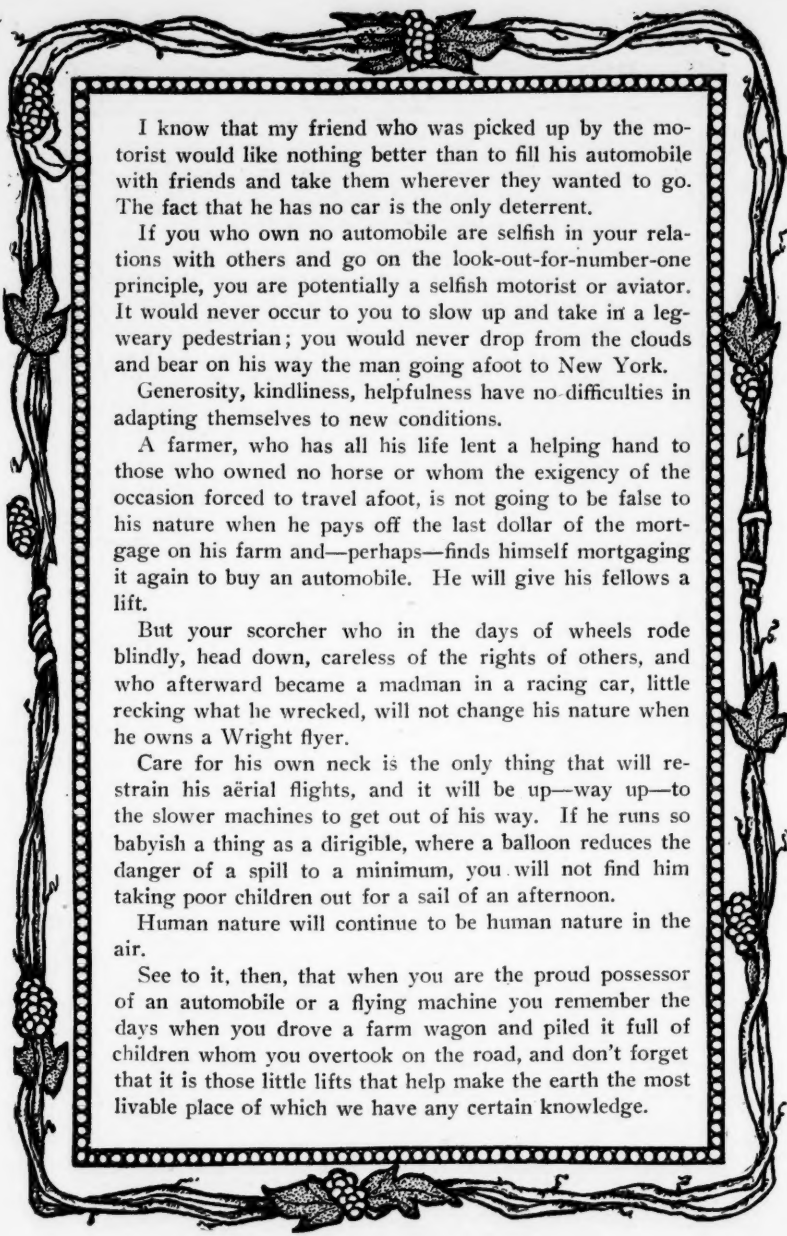
And young Footsore feels that the world is all right and that there are just as kind people among the clouds as there are on earth.

I suppose there are old-fashioned people who would say: "All wrong. Young man gets an entirely erroneous idea of the world. Anything worth having is worth working for, and here this young fellow is saved over a week of hard work, and he makes no return."

There is no doubt that the young man is in debt, but I think he is in debt to mankind, not to the aviator, who was looking for no return.

If our young friend ever gets a dirigible balloon or even an aeroplane that seats but two and goes kiting around the air all by himself, without ever looking down to see whether he can't give some poor plodder a lift, then he was not worthy of the aid he received from the balloonist.

But the will to do is often just as good as the actual doing.



I know that my friend who was picked up by the motorist would like nothing better than to fill his automobile with friends and take them wherever they wanted to go. The fact that he has no car is the only deterrent.

If you who own no automobile are selfish in your relations with others and go on the look-out-for-number-one principle, you are potentially a selfish motorist or aviator. It would never occur to you to slow up and take in a leg-weary pedestrian; you would never drop from the clouds and bear on his way the man going afoot to New York.

Generosity, kindness, helpfulness have no difficulties in adapting themselves to new conditions.

A farmer, who has all his life lent a helping hand to those who owned no horse or whom the exigency of the occasion forced to travel afoot, is not going to be false to his nature when he pays off the last dollar of the mortgage on his farm and—perhaps—finds himself mortgaging it again to buy an automobile. He will give his fellows a lift.

But your scorcher who in the days of wheels rode blindly, head down, careless of the rights of others, and who afterward became a madman in a racing car, little recking what he wrecked, will not change his nature when he owns a Wright flyer.

Care for his own neck is the only thing that will restrain his aerial flights, and it will be up—way up—to the slower machines to get out of his way. If he runs so babyish a thing as a dirigible, where a balloon reduces the danger of a spill to a minimum, you will not find him taking poor children out for a sail of an afternoon.

Human nature will continue to be human nature in the air.

See to it, then, that when you are the proud possessor of an automobile or a flying machine you remember the days when you drove a farm wagon and piled it full of children whom you overtook on the road, and don't forget that it is those little lifts that help make the earth the most livable place of which we have any certain knowledge.



The Perfectly Sensible Christmas

—BY—
Anne O'Hagan



ILLUSTRATED BY HARRIET ADAIR NEWCOMB

WE all watched the experiment with eagerness—the experiment of my cousin-in-law, Hilda, who declared in October that for once she intended to be a perfectly free woman in the matter of her Christmas celebration. Hilda, it is almost supererogatory to explain, is a spinster; no other woman could, even for an insanely hopeful second, dream of a Christmas conducted according to her own tastes. Even with Hilda, the husbandless, the childless, the motherless, fatherless—the generally unfettered and irresponsible—we all had some doubt as to the possibility of a Christmas other than that which the traditions of antiquity and the practices of the modern world prescribed.

Still, Hilda has a way of doing what she sets out to do. She is known in our circle as “strong-minded.” She has, for example, remained unmarried in the face of strenuous opposition, not only on the part of her family connection, which is orthodox in its view of “woman’s sphere,” but also on the part of certain interested and per-

suasive gentlemen. She has earned her own living, although Maisie, her married sister, has entreated her “to make her home” with Maisie and Maisie’s brood, and although Ned, her brother, has offered her an allowance. She has lived by herself, although we have all raised an outcry against it, some of us on the ground that there would surely be a burglar in her apartment some night, others because she might be taken sick some time and fail to make Letty, her cook, hear her; and still others because it isn’t customary for women of some youth and more than some attractiveness, to live in solitude. But Hilda has smiled serenely upon all our objections and has done precisely as she pleased. Yet even with this record of past successes in the defiance of public opinion, we felt that she might not achieve her “perfectly sensible Christmas.” As my Brother Joe, whom we all suspect of being one of the most persistent opponents of Hilda’s spinsterhood, said, we weren’t backing Hilda to win in this contest.

"You'll not be able to do it, Hilda," he said, on the evening in October when she gave us warning of her fell determination. He shook his head at her, and filled his pipe, with a provoking air of foresight. We were all at Maisie's—Maisie is married to my Cousin Philip.

"You'll see," said Hilda placidly.

"What on earth is the matter with the kind of Christmas we've always had?" demanded Maisie indignantly. The family reunion was to be at her house this year, and she took Hilda's declaration as a personal affront.

"What's your idea of a satisfactory celebration, Hilda?" asked Philip.

"No celebration at all," replied Hilda, with the most disconcerting promptness.

"Down with church and state—she's a regular anarchist!" said Joe, pretending to speak in an aside. Hilda frowned at him—he can generally ruffle her, at least.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed, with asperity. "Of course, you're joking, but you mean it for one of those half-true jests. And what could be more absurd than that there is anything—anything—" She floundered for a word.

"Illegal? Immoral? Unusual? Unsocial?" suggested Joe kindly.

"Anything *remarkable* in my wanting to escape the extremely tiresome farce of the whole thing, for once! If I had any children to dole out fairy stories to, it might be different. But look at the situation as it is! I have a brother and a sister, with the persons whom they have respectively married, and their children. Those are all my ties." She managed to give Joe a look, then. "I have some twenty or thirty distant connections, some five or six very dear friends, and some eighty or ninety dear enough friends. We are all on the same level, approximately, in the matter of income; that is, not one of us needs anything from the rest. Yet here I am asked, each year of my life, to devote two months to scrambling through shops and bazaars, looking for gifts for them; I am supposed to

come out here to Maisie in the suburbs, or to Ned in the suburbs, and get up an immense excitement over a spindling fir tree and a lot of tinsel and a few strings of colored popcorn. I am expected to exclaim and clap my hands and rejoice over little Etta's new doll and little Alfred's new sled—as though I hadn't been surfeited with dolls and sleds for decades! I am expected to write a lot of charming notes, gushing with rapture over the receipt of things which I don't want, or which I should have preferred to select for myself. Well, I won't do it—that's flat. Not this year. And I'm serving notice on you all now that I am not going to buy or make one of you a gift; and that if I receive one from any of you, or from any one else, I shall send it back. And that I'm not coming near the suburbs during the holidays. And that I'm not going to hang up any stockings, or to trim any Christmas tree, for any niece or nephew. And that I'm going to act on December twenty-fifth exactly as I should on March twenty-fifth or September twenty-fifth. And no one is to be shocked or alarmed by it."

"I thought you liked the mink muff Phil and I gave you last Christmas," said Maisie, aggrieved.

"Goosie! I was talking about the truck we give and get, not about the tribute levied from our own families. The muff was a beauty."

"And Etta," pursued Maisie, "is not only your niece, but your goddaughter, and every one says that she looks like you." Maisie is not strong-minded!

"Have you any objection to telling us, Hilda," asked Philip, "how you do propose to spend the glad Christmas-tide, since none of the customary ways appeal to you?"

"I'm going to ignore it," said Hilda.

"Bravo!" cried Joe. "That's the boldest statement I ever heard from a human—it beats saying that you intend to ignore the mountain lion which contests a path with you, or that you have determined to pay absolutely no attention to the tornado which is sweeping across the prairie on which your house



I used to drop into her apartment at tea-time, exhausted from the shopping ordeal.

stands. Bravo, Hilda! You may not be sensible, but you're superb!"

I have sometimes thought that Joe didn't take just the right tone with Hilda for a suitor, and as she looked daggers at him now, though finally joining in the laugh his words raised, I was more doubtful than ever about his methods. As for the Christmas experiment, of course she was absolutely determined upon her course after those tactful words from my brother.

During November, I am obliged to say that Hilda seemed to be having a good time, while the rest of us were certainly not. I used to drop into her apartment at tea-time, exhausted from the shopping ordeal, and there she would be, sitting before her fire, as

comfortable and aggravating as possible. It was tacitly agreed among us that she was not to be told about our Christmas plans—that the word was not to be mentioned to her. So that, though I might sigh and groan and complain of the crush in the shops, or the abominable service on the street cars, I never referred to "Christmas" crowds and discomforts. And she would merely smile and smile, and look the picture of indolent comfort, until I took my leave, and staggered out with the bundles I was carrying, because, "of course, the delivery is a little late and uncertain at this time of year, miss," as I heard from every clerk.

When I heard Maisie moaning because she couldn't match the yellow

silk out of which she was embroidering a waist for her dear friend, Gertrude—who, I knew, had recently decided that yellow made her look faded—and when I saw Gertrude tearing her hair over the problem of what to give Maisie; and when I saw thousands of other women, wild-eyed, tense, straining, hurrying, anxious, in the shops and streets, I thought that Hilda had chosen the better part. When the annual question of what to give Aunt Samantha, who never read, who never knit, sewed, went anywhere, or did anything, threatened, as usual, to disrupt the family, Hilda, at peace in her little sitting room, seemed embodied wisdom to me. When Cousin Philip swore futilely and falsely that he simply would not give each of the clerks in his office a week's salary as a gift—times were too hard, and he simply couldn't afford it, and it was highway robbery, anyway—she appeared, crowned with common sense, as with a garland. When the church decoration committee became involved in an acrimonious dispute as to whether "Hark, the herald angels sing," or "Peace on earth, good will to men" was the less hackneyed quotation; when those all too sophisticated "letters to Santa Claus" of the children demanded electrical toys worth a season's subscription to the Symphony; when the servants wore their looks of greedy deference; when the very postman became a smiling, civil, fellow-human sort of person, instead of the grouchy, grum-and-gruff one he was the rest of the year—when all these and many more things of a similar nature struck my attention, Hilda's course seemed inspired. Still, I imagined that she might be a little lonely.

As the days passed, her loneliness began to seem greater than her common sense. One gets a sort of second wind in the Christmas race, as in most others. After you have passed through the state of hating your nearest and dearest because you can't afford to give them what you want to give, and loathing the rest of the world because you have to give it anything at all; after

you have passed the period of scorning the tired mother who pushes and jams her way through a crowded store with one baby in her arms and one scarcely larger at her skirts; after you have ceased to rail at the manners of the half-exhausted shop girls, and to threaten the drivers of delivery wagons with immediate extinction on one account and another—you suddenly begin to like it all. You poke a friendly finger at the chin of the baby, drooping over its mother's shoulder, and you find yourself telling her—she is always a poor, bewildered soul from the remotest outlying districts—where the woolly lambs are kept; instead of glaring at the man who keeps you waiting at the stationer's while he weighs the merits of a set of brass desk appointments against those of a green, near-bronze set, you are on the verge of advising him on the subject; instead of thinking that the firs are all mangy-looking this year, very different from the trees which used to grow when you were young, you sniff the balsamy odor, and tell yourself "how it carries you back"; and the mysterious little packages accumulating in the bureau drawers, and the hasty conferences under the back stairs, all begin to seem friendly and interesting, instead of "the same old thing." By that time, Hilda loomed upon my imagination as a lonely creature.

I made my way to her apartment a few days before the great day, along streets that fairly shrieked of it; I passed through outdoor city aisles lined with carts of holly and pine and cedar; I passed stores whose every pane blazed with red stars of berries, or of humble paper; I jostled men, women, and children, laden with parcels. Delivery wagons rolled rapidly up and down; messenger boys moved with an alertness foreign to their workaday habit. In Hilda's house every window except hers was already draped in shining green wreaths. If she could "ignore" all this, she was stronger-minded than even we had given her credit for being.

She did not look quite so superior

as she had done earlier in the game. Or perhaps it was merely that I had gotten my second wind and was enjoying the flurry of preparation. Her rooms were quite empty of any sign of Christmas activity; there were no spicy odors on the air. Letty, who admitted me, had worn a lowering brow.

"What-all's this Miss Hilda done tell me?" she had whispered in the hall. "Ain't we-all goin' to Miss Maisie's or to Marse Ned's, for Chrismus? An' what do you think, Miss Ida! She ain't goin' to have no holiday party for the chillrun, same as always befoah. She ain't quarrel with they-all, is she?"

Hilda looked a little tired, I thought, in spite of her rational abstention from the season's cares and labors.

"What have you been doing?" I demanded cheerfully, avoiding, of course, all reference to the tabooed topic.

"Doing? What is there to do? When all the world is crazy, a sane person is really at a loss for occupation!"

"Elucidate," I begged her.

"Oh, you know very well what I mean," answered Hilda crossly. "I haven't been asked to leave this house on any errand of entertainment for two weeks. Why? Everybody's so busy getting ready for Christmas that they're not giving dinners or luncheons or theatre parties. I've had the en-

livening society of the affronted Letty for my chief solace for a fortnight. Not even my assurance that she should have her Christmas money has appeased her. Maisie and Ned haven't been near me——"

"They're so——" I began weakly.

"Yes, I know; they're so busy buying extravagant toys for their spoiled offspring, tying up silly trifles in silly tissue paper for people who won't know what to do with them when they receive them, hanging needle-dropping branches all over their houses, buying candles to set their trees afire, and all the rest of it, that they haven't had time to inquire whether their sister is dead or alive!"

Hilda seemed a little unjust—she had certainly selected her own course this year. But I didn't feel called upon to tell her so. I merely drank some tea.

"Even you've abandoned me completely," she went on, with a more



"Children piling into my room and onto my bed with their bumpy socks and their toy engines under their elbows."

amiable, though more hurt, tone. "You and your brother."

"We've been——" I began.

"You've been busy trying to remember whether Maisie and Philip had a piazza bridge set or not; trying to make up your minds whether you really needed to give anything to the Xs this year, or not; trying to buy the servants something 'personal' which they would like as well as if you gave them the plain price of it. Oh, I know! You've been busy, too!"

"You don't seem to be enjoying your experiment," I ventured.

"I'm enjoying it thoroughly," Hilda assured me. "I'm only sorry that I have been able to see so little of my family and my friends, because of their absorption in a wasteful folly."

After this characterization of our modest efforts to celebrate the glorious yuletide, she informed me that she was going to put herself beyond the reach of the urging telephone on Christmas Eve.

"If I stay here," she said, "you know how it will be. Maisie, Philip, Ned, and Kate, all the eight children, perhaps even you and Joe, Uncle Allan, and Uncle Dwight—everybody will be after me to join the family party. And out of mere inability to be firm, I shall yield. Well, I'm going away. There is only one sensible place for a sensible woman to spend a sensible Christmas—that's a good hotel. I'm going—this is confidential—to the Carteret, where the family can't get me on the telephone."

"They had red satin bows on green holly wreaths in their windows at the Carteret," I warned her. "I saw them as I came down, an hour ago."

"Well, there won't be any other Christmas reminders there. The management won't ask me to sit up trimming its tree or filling its children's stockings for it. There won't be any make-believe waifs carolling through Thirtieth Street, as there were out in Reedy Valley last Christmas. There won't be any children piling into my room and onto my bed in the morning with their bumpy stockings in their

hands and their toy engines under their elbows. No, I can go, and be warm and quiet and comfortable. The waiter who serves my dinner won't urge me to eat more than is good for me; no one will expect me to be gay and girlish, and go skating with the children after church. The Carteret shall be my retreat from importunity to join you all in your amusements. When you and the world are sane again, we'll take up living on the old basis."

Thus loftily spake Hilda, but I thought she spoke without real enthusiasm.

I happened to mention the matter to Joe that evening at dinner.

"There's a lot in her view of the case," he growled—of course, I might have known he would agree with Hilda as long as she was not there to hear him. "We do overdo it all to a sickening degree."

I meekly said nothing, and Joe took himself off soon after dinner. The next day he was called away on business—the first time it had ever happened at Christmas time. I felt very melancholy as I went out to Reedy Valley alone on Christmas Eve. We did all the usual things with as much spirit as we could infuse into them, with the knowledge of Hilda's lonely severity and Joe's discomfort of travel to tone down our spirits. Maisie told the children about the Lowly Manger and the Guiding Star, and I played "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and "Come, All Ye Faithful," and Philip read the youngsters "The Night Before Christmas." And we grown-ups were all very glad that it began to snow, for we held the impression that Christmas had always been a white and frosty time in our favored youth. Then the children were put to bed, and there was a sound of pattering back and forth overhead, and giggling, and whispering and soft, young gurglings of mystery and delight. And by and by that subsided, and we trimmed the tree and laid our white paper parcels beneath it.

It was all very simple, and I dare say as silly as Hilda would have us

believe—but I liked it so that my eyes and my throat ached. Not yet, in spite of formalities of observance, in spite of hypocrisies of giving, in spite of extravagance and overdoing, has the tender heart of the great festival been spoiled; and when we elders come to the night before the day itself and do for the children the simple little things that kind hands did for us and loving thoughts planned for us, years and years ago, we are links in a long chain of love and unselfishness and joy.

I was sorry that Hilda was not with us that night—being sensible at the Carteret seemed a poor thing. And I was sorry that she was not there the next day, when the jocosely ceremonious distribution of presents took place amid shouting and great laughter and some real appreciation. For, after all, like most persons in our walk of life, we did not give one another extravagant things, but really strove to make our trifles represent a real thought of one another's needs or tastes. And when we sat down at the great dinner table, bright with its berries and its candle shades and its excited young faces, I was very sorry for her at the Carteret, and for poor Joe on his train.

It was while we were cannibalistically demolishing a round little Santa Claus of strawberry-and-white ice that the door opened and the two absentees stood before us. Joe had Hilda firmly by the wrist, so that, although she hung back, with laughter and protest, she was dragged in through the door. She looked happier than she had looked since she set out to have a perfectly sensible Christmas—indeed, happier than she had ever looked.

The children shouted, and the elders demanded to know a great many things in one breath.

"It was so horribly lonely being sensible," began Hilda, "that when Joe came in to the Carteret, when I had just ordered luncheon, I could have wept for joy. And when he said that we could just catch the one-seventeen—I came! It isn't," she protested hastily, "that I believe in the way we cele-



"It was so horribly lonely being sensible in the Carteret!"

brate—only it's worse not to celebrate at all! And, chickens," she addressed the wide-eyed children, "your presents from your Aunt Hilda will come along to-morrow. I haven't made any yet."

"Oh, yes, you have—one," Joe reminded her. And when we saw her blush, like eighteen, instead of thirty-one, we gave a shout of joy.

"Oh, I shall bless good, hard sense forever," cried Maisie, falling upon her sister's neck. "It was all over in one violent attack, and it showed you how depressingly lonely and miserable good hard sense could make you; and now you're going to be as comfortably silly and happy as the rest of us."

Thus ended my Cousin-in-law Hilda's effort to achieve the perfectly sensible Christmas. As my sister-in-law, she has never shown even an inclination for the lonely eminence of entire common sense, and we all find her much improved thereby. For, after all, this is a world that requires all the little garlands hung and all the little lanterns lit as often as may be. And no garlands and no lanterns are quite so sweet and bright as those where-with the not-too-wise deck the house of life at Christmas time.



A HERO IN THE FLESH

BY MAX MARCIN

WITH DRAWINGS BY G.W. HARTING

THE fixed expression of one whose eyes have been directed a long time on a distant object was on the old whaler's face. Yet, as he sat tilted back against the door of his rude hut at the bottom of the cliff, there spread before him only the vast expanse of ocean, sailless, without projecting shore or intervening island bank. He watched the waves roll in, knot themselves in a snarl of foam on the beach, rush up the slant of sand and recede into the watery expanse, as though each breaker held a new meaning, a new fascination for him. Thus he remained in serene contemplation, until the sombre tint of the sea betokened the approach of dusk and brought him out of his abstraction. Uncrossing his legs, he permitted the chair to tip forward. Almost mechanically he got up and clambered up the cliff.

The sun was sinking rapidly behind the moors. Streaks of gold and purple marked their contrasting colors amid patches of translucent blue. Already a fringe of black, that began at the base of the distant hills, was extending slowly toward the cliff. For a moment the whaler let his eyes rest on a distant object, dim in the vanishing light, and then, lest darkness find him unprepared, he descended quickly to the hut.

As if to forestall the onrushing night, he climbed the stationary ladder leading from the living room to the attic of his low abode, his figure a misty outline in the enveloping gloom. Slowly he made his way toward a small square window, in which hung sus-

pended the wire frame of a swinging lamp. His elbows brushed against the bulge of garments hanging in shadowy seclusion against the wall. A faded skirt that shielded a white petticoat yellowed by age, rustled feebly as he passed. Three or four waists, a long yellow slicker of oilskin, and a flannel wrap hid other portions of the dilapidated partition. Lying across the bed, spread as if ready to wear, a black skirt and jacket added their mute testimony of the room once having had a feminine occupant.

Lifting the wire lamp from its hook, the old whaler jerked the chimney out of its groove, and snipped the black rim of the wick with a pair of long shears. When he had applied the match and readjusted the lamp he permitted it to swing against the pane.

The pale light pierced the immediate darkness without, and threw a wan illumination within. The whaler walked to the middle of the room, his reflection showing in the cracked mirror hanging by the side of the bed. It revealed a face, tanned and almost wizened, framed in an inverted arch of dark-gray beard that curved beneath the chin. Eyes of salty blue, set deep beneath a slightly bulging brow, seemed eternally looking into the distance. The drooping lines of the thin lips, instead of weakening the face, gave it a purposeful aspect, like a man concentrated on a single resolve.

He stood motionless a moment, in silent contemplation of the objects in the room. Gradually his eyes uplifted

and the set lips parted and spread. The sombre stillness of the room was broken by a prayer that came clear and fervent, like the outpouring of a heart's heavy burden. When he had finished, he returned to the window and glanced in the direction of the square, visible through a break in the cliff.

The distant object he had seen crossing the moors now was drawn up in front of the post office. Two tired horses, flecked with foam and the dust of the road that links Nantucket and Siasconset, waited impatiently for the last of the passengers to alight from the coach. He could see the visitors group themselves about the driver, whose outstretched hand pointed toward the window at which the old whaler stood. He knew that the new arrivals were listening to the story of the light that had gleamed from Billy Cash's window every night for twenty-five years—gleamed there as a beacon fire to fix the homeward path of a wanderer.

With a grunt of disapproval at the unwelcome notoriety, old Billy descended to the living room and lit the oil lamp on the table. Then he walked to a square wooden chest, studded with brass nails, that stood in a corner. He lifted the cover, and from among a pile of old relics picked up in strange quarters of the globe he brought forth a faded plush box. His thumb pressed against the spring, releasing the clamp. The box parted and there was revealed a long blue ribbon, to which was pinned a round gold medal. He caressed the glittering object tenderly, as if brushing the dust off the hallowed memories it recalled.

The rays of the lamp fell on the medal, and, as Old Billy bent his head to read again its inscription, a gentle mist gathered in his eyes. His glance rested on the obverse side, with its coat of arms of the United States. He lingered a moment on the lettering above the eagle's head. "Act of Congress," it said, followed by the date. In bold relief beneath the talons he saw his name—William Cash. On the reverse side was a representation of a man in

oilskins launching a skiff in a high surf. With a glow of pride he read the inscription that encircled the picture.

Presented by the Congress of the United States to William Cash, for conspicuous bravery. At risk of his own life he saved the lives of seven human beings, who, but for him, must have perished in the wreck of the schooner *Pierre*.

Across the medal, forming a sort of base for the circle, were stamped the place and date of the wreck.

The light tread of a foot, followed by the sharp swish of a skirt, brought the aged, weather-worn hero out of his contemplation of the golden symbol. Looming out of the darkness, the outline of a woman's form gathered to itself the light in the doorway. At sight of her face the whaler rose as though a spring had set him on his feet. A quiver of excitement galloped up and down his spine, and left him breathless and bewildered.

"Mary!" His voice quavered with a mingling of love and reproach.

The breeze from without pressed her rich cloak in long folds about her figure, and blew wisps of hair against her cheeks. She stood uncertain in the doorway, while the whaler's eyes ascended her form. He took in all the details of her attire, from the tips of the tan shoes that peered from beneath the hem of her cloak to the black straw hat that only partly hid the mass of brownish hair liberally sprinkled with gray.

"So you've come back?" he murmured.

She took a step forward with hand outstretched. He could see that her face had grown to maturity, and that the well-poised head rested on a figure grown matronly.

"Father!" Her voice was low and clear, with a pleasant, musical ring.

The twitch of his face reflected the emotions called into life at sound of the name. But he hung back, repressing the impulses that tugged within him.

"I got your letter," he snapped. "Sit down."

She dropped into the wooden chair



The rays of the lamp fell on the medal.

at the table, and let her hand rest on the medal. As if projected forward by an invisible force, the old whaler snatched the plush box from her fingers and clicked it shut. He dropped it into the chest, and banged down the cover.

"Ye shan't have it; no, ye shan't!"

he exclaimed bitterly. "I'd sooner heave it overboard."

She eyed him steadily, without trace of embarrassment. The suggestion of a smile flickered across her face as she watched him seat himself on the chest.

"Don't be unreasonable," she said.

"Onreasonable! Ye come here and

tell me that! That's all you came here for to tell me? After nigh twenty-five years, that's all you've got to say to your father?"

Her head tilted upward, the furrows of her forehead gathering between the eyebrows.

"I—I wrote you," she half stammered, "wrote you several times. But you wouldn't reply."

"An' ye sent your agent, too," he blurted. "Sent him here, thinkin' maybe it was for sale. He offered me a hundred dollars for it, and he waved the money before my eyes. Then he offered me two hundred, and up to a thousand. But he didn't get it, did he?" His face contorted into a scowl. "I knew why he wanted it," he rasped. "It was for you—to hang it up in your fine house, to show it to your fine friends. The medal of your father. Him from whom you ran away! Him what you didn't even bid to your wedding! Ye thought, now that ye had money, to show your friends how your father was honored by Congress—your father! He was all right to talk about, but not to have around! Oh, I figgered it all out, an' the medal shall never go to you or yours."

The vehemence and bitterness of his words sent the blood rushing to her face.

"I didn't come for the medal," she soothed. "I came to see you."

The lines of his face relaxed, but only for a moment. The bitterness born of years of humiliation could not be wiped out so easily.

"Everybody in 'Sconset knows about it," he growled. "For years they've told it—how ye went away an' got married and never came back. All the summer visitors hear the story as soon as they arrive; no doubt ye listened to it when ye got out of the barge! An' they tell, too, about the death of your husband, and then they bring the visitors around here and point me out and say: 'See, that's Mrs. Wentworth's father. That's him what got the medal, and whose daughter now is the society woman down in New York. He ain't seen her in twenty-five years; she

don't know him no more.' And the Nantucket paper prints everything ye do, all the big affairs ye give, and the trips to Europe ye take. An' here am I, fishin' every day, fishin' so as to get enough food to keep body and soul together. Then ye thought to tempt me with the thousand dollars, but I'll keep on fishin'. I wouldn't touch your money!"

He checked the flow of words and shut the door, bolted it, and then pressed his back against it. A tremor of fear ran down her frame and drained the blood from her face.

"What are you doing, father?" she demanded.

"Ye've come back," he said slowly, pointing his clinched hand at her. "Ye've come back; I knew you would, some day. I kept the light burnin' in the window every night, waitin' for ye to come to the home ye left. When I hit ye that night"—his eyes blazed with a peculiar light—"when I laid my hand on ye, I thought ye had been carryin' on with one o' them city chaps at the hotel. When ye ran away, I said to myself: 'She'll come back some day; he'll cast her aside, like an old shoe. An' if she's brought shame on the name that's been honored by my country, I'll—I'll kill her.'" He paused a moment for breath. "But ye didn't bring shame on your father—not that way," he continued in a milder tone. "An' I thought as how you'd come back and ask forgiveness, so I kept the light burnin'. But ye didn't come, an' ye didn't write till one day ye thought how nice it would be to get hold o' the medal, and keep it as a heirloom in your family. An' then ye sent the agent to tempt me! I waited a long time, an' every night at sundown I lit the lamp, an' every mornin' at sunrise I put it out. An' I left the things in your room just as they were when ye went away."

Her breath was coming in long sighs. The old whaler came closer, and placed his hand on her elbow.

"Only one person will put out that light at night," he gasped. "Only one. When ye come back, when ye sleep in

the room ye left, ye'll put out the lamp an' 'Sconset'll know Billy Cash's daughter has come back, has returned to her father. Ye'll do that to-night—now, won't ye?"

His voice now had something tender in it, something appealing and irresistible. She looked up at him, quivering under the vibration of some tender chord within her. But she drew back suddenly.

"It's impossible," she said. "Father, you cannot expect it of me, now. I arrived only to-night, and they're waiting for me at the hotel."

"Who's waitin'?" he demanded.

"Why, my daughter, and her husband, and their little boy."

He shrank as from a sudden blow.

"Then I'm a grandfather, an' a great-grandfather, an' I never even seen 'em," he moaned.

"I'll bring them over to-morrow," she flashed.

"No, ye won't," he returned. "Ye don't want 'em to know your father, although when he's dead you'll be proud enough to show his medal. There's a heap o' difference between a hero in the flesh an' a hero in the spirit. I figgered it all out, an' ye shan't get the medal."

"Father, you don't understand; you can't understand. I had my way to make socially, even after my marriage. I had to fight——"

"We'll not talk about that," he interrupted. "I've got my pride, too; an' now you're here, under your father's roof, an' here you'll stay to-night an' put out the light. An' to-morrow 'Sconset'll know that light didn't burn twenty-five years in vain."

"But it's impossible—utterly impossible." There was a note of irritation in her voice. "I tell you I cannot."

He brought his fist down hard on the table.

"By God, gal, you're my daughter!" he cried. "I'm your father, and you'll obey me to-night." He pointed to the opening in the wall above the ladder. "Ye'll climb up there," he almost hissed, "an' ye'll stay there to-night. By God, ye will!"

She got up from the chair, and met his gaze steadily. Her impassive face portended a storm held in restraint.

"Just the same as before," she said. "The same iron will, the same unreasonableness that drove me away. Father, you cannot dominate me, now."

He stepped closer to her, still pointing to the lighted opening in the wall.

"Are you going?" he demanded.

She tapped her foot petulantly, and drew back a step.

"No, I am not going." Her words came slowly, as if to give them added emphasis.

There was a menace in his glance as he edged around the table and drew himself to his full stature.

"You'll not leave here to-night," he pronounced.

His breath carried the violent throb of his passions against her face. In the presence of this authority, reassured after the lapse of so many years, she felt her determination sliding from her. Her eyes shifted from him to the illuminated aperture above the ladder.

"The things are all just as you left them," he reassured her.

"Perhaps, to-morrow," she parried.

"No, to-night," he flashed back.

"Father, you must be insane!" she cried bitterly.

The remark cut deep, stirred his mind into a tumult that brooked no restraint. His two hands clamped themselves about her wrists and forced her against the wall.

"Ye'll sleep here to-night," he said in a tone of finality, "an' I'll sit up to see ye stay there. An' your own breath'll put out the light."

She tried to free herself from his grip, and in the struggle he pressed her harder against the partition. With a sudden jerk, he drew her forward, and backed her toward the ladder. The forces boiling within him gave him a strength that overcame all her resistance, and she became in his hands a lay figure, helpless, almost depending on him for support. Near the foot of the ladder he swung her around sharply and seized her shoulders.

"Now, ye go up there!" he commanded.

She made an effort to obey, but her limbs refused to respond to her will. The old whaler's eyes ran up and down her form, as if estimating her weight. He stood undecided, when a knock at the door startled him out of his uncertainty. The rap seemed to galvanize her into new life.

"There's some one without!" she exclaimed, her features tense with expectancy.

With a look of disappointment, he walked to the door and forced back the bolt. On the threshold stood three figures, timorous and puzzled, in the shamefaced attitude of intruders. One of these was a young man, with the suggestion of the college athlete in his build. By his side stood a willowy figure in white, a cream-colored cape slung across her arm. At sight of her face, the old whaler stepped back with a gasp. It flashed across his mind that here was the past suddenly brought forward twenty-five years, in the form of his daughter. A boy, fair-haired and chubby, tugged at her hand, and dragged her into the room.

"I hope we're not intruding?" came from the man. "We heard about the light and about the brave act that won recognition from Congress, and, as we were waiting for some one at the hotel, we thought we'd like to drop around to meet you."

The old whaler eyed him coldly, without replying. His glance switched to the face of the young woman. He scrutinized her features as if under the spell of a subtle fascination. Her gaze wavered before the bold scrutiny, and then Old Billy saw her eyes expand, as though they be-

held a sudden apparition. At the same time, the figure of Mrs. Wentworth stepped out of the shadow of the wall. In a voice barely audible, she said:

"Father, this is my family. My daughter, my grandson, and Mr. Wright, my son-in-law." She pointed at each of them in turn, trying hard to retain her self-composure.

The son-in-law stammered in amazement at the introduction:

"Why, I—really—I didn't know."



His two hands clamped themselves about her wrists and forced her against the wall.

"I thought your father was dead," burst forth the wife.

The deception she had practiced forced itself on the whaler's mind, and he turned slowly toward his daughter, a look of immeasurable contempt on his face. Mrs. Wentworth slid noiselessly to the side of her son-in-law, as if to shield herself behind his protecting presence.

"I simply was paying my father a visit to prepare him for your coming to-morrow," she lied complacently. "I thought I would surprise you all. I was about to leave when you arrived so unexpectedly."

The father's eyes, that had softened at sight of the grandchild and great-grandchild, threw the glint of steel at his daughter. His arm, pointing steady as an iron rod, showed the way to the door.

"Go—all of you!" he commanded.

Standing like a bronze statue, his love congealed into hate, the last flicker of the hope that had kept him waiting all these years turned into bitter disappointment, he watched them file suddenly out of the room. Not until he was sure they would not return did he unbend and seat himself on the bottom rung of the stationary ladder. His thoughts were confused, his mind uncertain.

"No, I won't put it out," he murmured finally, bringing his palm down on his knee.

'Sconset gathered in groups in front of the bulletin posted in the post office the following afternoon. Nothing as important as the forthcoming event announced on the square sheet of paper, had stirred the village since the great wreck of the ocean liner off the near-by shoals. On next Saturday night, the bulletin proclaimed, William Cash would present to the village the medal he had received from Congress. And 'Sconset, in appreciation of the gift, would honor Billy Cash with a banquet.

The wreck of the *Pierre* and Billy's part in the rescue of the ship's human cargo became again a story of the present. The old whaler lived the glories

of the days when an entire nation offered its adulation. Summer visitors and natives united to make proper acknowledgment of his gift, and 'Sconset became charged with an air of busy preparation. The casino was transformed into a temporary banquet hall, and the streets leading from it to the cliff were festooned with colored lanterns.

The band from Nantucket preceded Old Billy's carriage on the night of the banquet. The lane from the hut became a path of glory, strewn with wild roses plucked from the moors, and animated by the presence of the villagers in their Sunday attire. The actors' colony marched to the banquet hall in a body, and throughout the evening performers of national reputation contributed to the entertainment.

These were hours of crowded happiness for the old whaler. Seated at the right of the toastmaster, he wore the same oilskins in which he had braved the storm on the day of the wreck. On his breast was pinned the medal that to-night would pass into possession of the village, to glorify forever the name of its humble hero. He stroked the shining disk as though the parting rent the tenderest chords of his heart, and yet his face glowed with a pride and a joy it had not known in many years.

Throughout the speechmaking he kept his mind fixed on a bit of imagery he had drawn from an old sermon, and with which he had determined to make the presentation. A silence, strained and eager, fell on the room, when the aged hero finally arose.

"The tree flourishes and spreads its branches," he said in a voice laden with sobs. "It is the root that has produced all. But when the branches are loaded with flowers and with fruit, they yield nothing to the root. Unlike the branches that spring from the root of a father's and mother's love, I yield the one flower of my possession to the village from which I have drawn my livelihood and from which has come the only solace of my old age."

He had prepared the speech care-

fully, with the help of the village clergyman. If its wording was somewhat crude, and its imagery somewhat vague to the diners, its underlying meaning fell with the crushing force of sudden bereavement on a little group in the rear of the hall. When the banquet was over and Billy elbowed his way through the throng, the group that had felt the keen thrust of his remarks hastened toward the door to intercept him. The whaler saw them and brushed by roughly.

"Billy! Billy!" A man's hand was laid heavily on his shoulder, and drew him back. He turned with a look of mingled scorn and triumph.

"I told her she shan't have it," he said, "neither she nor hers."

He brushed the hand from his shoulder and started forward.

"Billy, listen!" the other's voice whispered into his ear. "I know it all—the whole story. You were both wrong. You were hasty, impulsive, unjust. You drove her away——"

"That's a lie!" came the swift retort.

The whaler halted, a great rage swelling within him. He saw his daughter and his granddaughter coming closer. Their presence opened the flood-gates of his wrath. He swung about suddenly, and, pointing in the direction of the cliff, exclaimed:

"See that light? It's still burning in the window. But it goes out to-night—it goes with the medal." He felt the warmth of a girlish hand in his, but he dropped it as he would a piece of white-hot metal. "An' to-night ye pass out of my life forever," he burst forth, facing his daughter. "Every stitch of your clothing in the room goes into the fire. The bed in which ye slept I'll burn, an' your picture I'll tear into a hundred pieces and scatter 'em on the wind. I'll heave ye out of my mind—you wasn't worth waitin' for."

"Father! Father!" came in an agonized tone, but the old whaler had plunged into the darkness. As if fearful of being overtaken by some danger, he ran to the edge of the cliff and climbed down. He felt vaguely con-



G. W. HARTING

"Father, I'll put out the light when I retire."

scious of a form following with equal swiftness, but he did not stop to turn. Bounding into the hut, he closed and bolted the door, and with the agility of a cat climbed the stationary ladder. He could hear a loud knocking on the door, but he paid no heed to it.

"Father! Father! For God's sake, don't!" a woman's voice came through the door.

He recognized the voice, and tried to shut his ears to it. Into the little

attic room he crept and cast a comprehensive look at the simple furnishings and the scattered bits of female attire. His eyes fell on the black skirt spread on the bed, and he touched it with his fingers. The violent knocks on the door below rattled the hut and distracted his attention. It was as if some one were beating madly with both fists against the side of the house.

"Don't, don't! Father! Father!"

The cries rang out clear and floated through the open window in which hung the light. He pressed the hem of the skirt in his fist, ready to tear it off the bed. But the misery in the cries that filled his ears stayed his hand. Slowly his fingers opened, and he pressed his palm against the wall for support. The aspect of his face changed from grim determination to uncertainty.

"Father, forgive me!" came from below.

His look softened, and he stepped to

the low doorway. Something within him, against which he struggled vainly, impelled him forward and down the ladder. With short strides, as if trying to think amid the conflicting emotions that swept his frame, he walked to the door. His hand was unsteady as it clutched the bolt and pressed it backward. A force from without pushed the door inward with a violence that lurched the whaler against the wall. A woman's form swept through the opening and quickly climbed the ladder. When Billy looked up, half dazed, he saw his daughter standing with hands outstretched in the lighted opening beneath the rafters. Her hair was disheveled; her breath came in heavy gasps. When she had recovered somewhat from her exertions, she looked down at him, glad and relieved, as if a great weight had dropped from her mind.

"Father!" she called. "Father, I'll put out the light when I retire."



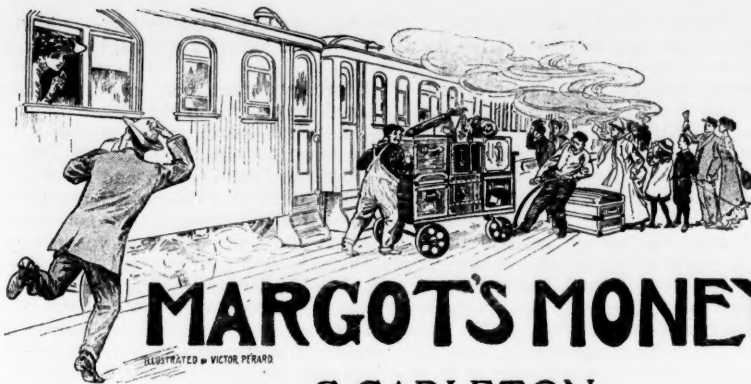
Carpe Diem

MY Gretchen dear, of many rhymes,
I'd say "good night" a thousand times,
Stand still, and turn when at the door,
And come to kiss your hand once more.

We both shall see another day,
But still—it's hard to go away;
And though to-morrow is so near,
Forgive me if I linger here.

You know, Time has such flying feet
That we should hold the present sweet,
Repeat "good night," nor think it vain,
Since *this* day won't come back again.

CARL HEINRICH.



ILLUSTRATED BY VICTOR PERRARD

By S. CARLETON

Author of "Bellegarde's Girl," "The Little White Moth," etc.

TOMMY BANNISTER put his sister into the Platon train, and stood outside the parlor-car window.

"I'm awfully sorry you have to go to Aunt Matilda when we're all having such a good time here," he observed, with the maddening sympathy of a person who had not to leave Lake Aylmer himself; "but, heavens, it's a mercy if it's got you out of having Margot Hutton here to stay. She was a sweet kid; but we've had a blessed escape from hauling her round if she's grown up anything like I last saw her at fourteen—all red hair and thick waist."

"She hasn't," said Mrs. Aylmer dryly. It was none of her brother's business that Aunt Matilda Hutton had only telegraphed for her because she was in such a furious rage with the girl under discussion that she was going to leave all her money away from her, nor that she herself was going to Platon merely to try to stop what she thought wicked injustice; but she might have aired that and something else if she had not been annoyed with Tommy. "You've been a pig about not wanting Margot here," she said, with resentment, "and I hope," enigmatically, "you'll get paid out for it! Good-by."

Tommy started; as also did the train. "Do you mean you haven't put her off?" he demanded, running wildly alongside.

"Oh, I put her off," oracularly. "Poor Margot, she's——" But a shriek from the engine drowned her voice, and anything she might have added about Margot Hutton.

Mr. Bannister, on the platform, heaved a sigh of relief. Teresa was always having stupid girls to stay, and he blessed his rich Aunt Matilda for having saved him from at least one of them. He passed without curiosity the Dovers' big motor waiting for the next train, and departed on his own concerns, which happened to be polo. At seven o'clock he landed cool, immaculate, and hungry in the dining room of the Lake Aylmer Country Club, and paused for a moment in the doorway.

He was anything but an impressionable person, but as he glanced casually round to see who was there something startled him. He caught his breath with a queer, knock-down feeling that was hardly pleasure, and stared.

At the corner table opposite him, against a mass of pink roses and pink-shaded lights, sat a girl—just a girl in a plain white satin gown. But for one second her eyes had met Mr. Bannis-

ter's with an extraordinary, startled joy in them. The next her dark lashes had fallen hastily, blankly; but Tommy's heart had had time to leap strangely before he could realize that he was staring at an unknown girl like a fool, and that he had got to go on to his own table.

And he did; but he carried the girl's face with him, as in all the twenty-eight years of his life he had never carried a girl's face before. It was absolutely lovely. Besides, she had chestnut hair that waved, and the youngest, whitest throat he had ever seen, that melted into softer whiteness under her little ears. She was not tanned at all—Tommy hated sunburned girls—yet somehow she had a look of out of doors, of vitality. He could imagine her riding and swimming like a dream. But it was not altogether her looks that had staggered him; it was the surprised, frank comradeship in her quickly withdrawn glance which had really put the galloping hurry into his blood. She had made a mistake, of course, since he had never seen her in his life; but if—

"When I marry, that's the girl," he reflected, with calm cocksureness, "if ever I dare to tell her so."

He sat down by the three men who shared his table, for once in silence. Somehow he could not so much as look again at the strange girl.

The man next him laughed. "Heavens, Tommy," said he, "don't you even see what's opposite you? Isn't she a beauty?"

"Isn't who?" Tommy looked, not opposite him, but at the speaker, on guard with a smooth lie. "I don't know what you mean."

"The girl over there with the Dovers; she's staying with them. Heavens, dream, isn't she?"

"I don't know," said Tommy calmly.

He did not want to look at the girl who was staying at the Dovers'; he wanted to go over and sit by her. He wondered, with injury, why, if his sister must have girls down to stay with her, she could not get them like this one, instead of the odiously remem-

bered Margot Hutton from whom Providence had just mercifully relieved him.

Harcourt, the man opposite him, leaned across the table.

"Tommy's an Egyptian ibis, without any heart to him," he scoffed. "Let him alone, Peters. You and I will get presented to the beauty after dinner, and you can bet your best polo stick I'll get the inside track of you in five minutes."

Mr. Bannister had a sudden conviction that he had never liked either of his friends. He ate his dinner in a dream of annoyance at their unceasing nonsense about the girl with the Dovers, and, as the fruit came round, was aware of a miracle. Mrs. Dover, half risen from her chair, was calling him.

No one who observed Mr. Bannister's progress across the room guessed his heart was thumping wildly; but it was. He heard Mrs. Dover introduce him to the chestnut-haired girl in what might have been Greek, for all he knew. But playing games had taught him to stand with the calm of a wooden Indian and wait for what else Mary Dover said.

"Billy and I have a bridge fight on," she smiled at him, "and, as we didn't expect this very nice visitor to-day, we had no time to put it off. Will you take her to see the lake and roses and things, Tommy, before it gets too dark?"

"If—" Tommy came to his senses with a jump, and evil joy at the baffling of Harcourt. "If the guest will trust me." He had not the least idea of her name, and no concern about it.

The girl in the white gown looked at him, then at Mrs. Dover, with a placid mischief he did not see.

"I'd love to go," she murmured. "You see, I've never been at a country club before."

"What!" exclaimed Tommy. He piloted her with speed and decision out of the nearest door before Harcourt could catch up to them, and the cool satin of her gown brushed against his hand as they went. "Do you hate them as much as that?"

"I've never even seen one. I'm from the real country, where they sit on their own piazzas after tea. This"—her laugh made Tommy laugh, too—"is different."

She looked at the lawns in front of her, the golf links that stretched dull emerald in the afterglow of the June sunset to the polo ground and the race course; but Tommy Bannister looked merely at the gate of a small, walled-in garden that he knew Harcourt did not suspect existed. He opened the gate. As the girl in her telltale white gown passed through it, he cast a glance behind him. There was no one on their trail, yet, but that was not saying they were safe. Mr. Bannister shut, carelessly, the little green gate in the old-fashioned brick wall.

"This," said he, placidly catching up to his charge, "isn't so different!"

The Dovers' guest looked round her, not at the show roses that grew elsewhere tied up to sticks, but at mass after mass of that sweetest rose of all the world—the pink, hundred-petaled rose of Provence.

"Oh," she cried, sniffing rapturously, "how did you know I'd like them?"

"I guessed," placidly. "You see, I was brought up in the real country myself."

"Were you?" said the strange girl. "How funny!"

"I don't see why." Mr. Bannister was nettled.

Without knowing it, she laughed. In her way, which was not his, she was as much excited as Tommy. Never in her life had she been out of the small New England town she had grown up in; and to-night she was learning, with a jerk, what the real world was like. The lights, the gayety, the people who had talked at dinner with such quick understanding, had waked in her something that answered to them. She belonged, somehow, to people and places like this as she had never belonged to Platon, and the dull round she had thought was life. Why, even the man beside her now understood her better than people she had known for years; and she pulled up her thoughts with a guilty

jerk. She was not rebellious about going back to Platon—and other things—yet; but she had a horrid feeling she was going to be. To put it out of her head she turned round on Tommy Bannister with eyes like stars.

"Tommy," she said sweetly, and she might as well have fired off a gun in his ear, "you haven't changed a bit, have you?"

"Changed?" gasped Tommy. He watched her sit down on a garden bench, and wondered if he could be going crazy.

"I said you *hadn't*," returned the girl demurely. "You're just as literal as ever. But I've changed, don't you think so?"

Tommy looked straight at her. "I give you my solemn honor," said he, "that I never even saw you in my life before."

"Think again!" A queer feeling of happiness that was almost triumph came over her as she saw his blank face. "I knew you didn't hear a word when Mrs. Dover introduced us."

"Nobody ever does," hastily. "But, all the same—"

"Oh, she meant to mumble," returned the girl calmly. "She knew you didn't know me. But I knew you—the minute you came into the room."

Tommy's tanned cheek reddened. "You couldn't have," he began, and the girl chuckled softly.

"Oh, Tommy, I'm Margot—Margot Hutton! And you used to play with me; till the last time you came to Platon you said I was a horrid fat lump, and wouldn't so much as speak to me."

Tommy sat down beside her. Somehow it had the effect of collapsing. This was Margot, whom he had been thankful Teresa's going away had made her put off; this heavenly vision with chestnut hair, and the roundest, slimmest of waists! But even yet he did not believe it. He stared at her bewilderedly.

"But, how—I don't understand," he said feebly. "Didn't Teresa put you off?"

"Oh, yes, on Mrs. Dover." Miss Hutton's regard was not without malice.



But for one second her eyes had met Mr. Bannister's with an extraordinary, startled joy in them.

"She met me at the station this afternoon, but they didn't tell you."

Tommy groaned at the knowledge in her eyes. "Don't," said he weakly. "I'm flattened out, now. But if I don't have it in for Teresa! Why, I could have met you myself—and there I was playing polo."

"I might have preferred Mrs. Dover," coolly. But it was not true, and with a horrid shock she knew it. Ever since she had been a tiny child Tommy, from his eight years' advantage, had been her secret idol. She had wept bitter tears when his twenty-two years ceased to notice her fourteen, and she had been heavenly glad to see him only this very evening. But there was no reason that he should know any of those things, nor that the very sight of his face had told her that Aunt Matilda might have been right when she said she had made a fool of herself in Platon. "You and I didn't part exactly friends," she added dryly. "You said—"

"I never!" averred Mr. Bannister hastily; and suddenly looked her in the eyes with a trick he had. Her voice had been provoking, and he knew it; and knew, too, that for his own welfare he had groveled enough. "I wasn't always an ass, though," he observed reflectively. "I used to carry you round

on my shoulder when you were nine, and give you peaches—if you kissed me for them!"

"Oh, I never!" It was Miss Hutton's turn to prevaricate, and she did it furiously. Some one else than Tommy had wished to kiss her of late, and there rushed over her the maddening conviction that it had been only the memory of Tommy's kisses to a child that had made her deny him. "Tommy, you know I never did!"

"No," agreed Tommy softly. "I kissed *you*. But I can talk about other things if you'd rather. What," with real innocence, "made Aunt Matilda wire for Teresa to-day? Is she dying again?"

Margot Hutton's face flushed till it literally flamed.

"I didn't know she had wired, till I—got here," she faltered, and stopped. She did know the reason for it. Could it be possible that only this afternoon she had felt perfectly sure she was right about her own conduct and Aunt Matilda wrong? But, however it was, what she had done she had got to stick to, and keep her given word. She was absolutely white as she stood up. "That's not true," she amended hastily. "I do know why Aunt Matilda sent for Teresa. She wasn't ill; she was only furious—with me."

"Why? I beg your pardon; it's none of my business."

"For—getting engaged." She had been proud of holding to her unapproved-of engagement yesterday; it was queer that to-night it gave her a lump in her throat.

Tommy, mechanically, had risen when she did. Now he stood rigid in the scented garden where the roses were ash color in the fading light. And they might have been ashes for all he saw of them. Against all the common sense he owned, he felt sick with shock.

"I congratulate—your fiancé," said he. His manner was more than could have been expected of a man whose words tasted very bitter in his mouth.

"It's I who should be congratulated," coldly. "He's a—clergyman. No one ever thought a clergyman would want to marry me."

"Why? 'Hath not a Jew eyes?'" Tommy did not look at her himself.

Margot Hutton really jumped. "You're intolerably, unbearably *rude*," she said cuttingly. "He—Mr. Milton—is one of the"—it was odd that her angry tongue stumbled on it—"most charming men I ever met."

"He should be the most charming," retorted the business-like Tommy. If there were any doubt about her caring for the man he was going to take the benefit of it; only idiots in books held their tongues when the only girl in the world was at stake. If he had been rude, he did not apologize; it was not till afterward that the girl remembered it.

"So he is," she assented crushingly. But a vision of George Milton rose before her; not as tall as the Tommy she had adored as a child and thought she had forgotten till to-night, not as easy; more—it came over her with a horrid start that Aunt Matilda had been right when she said the Reverend George Milton was pompous. "I—oh, of course he's far too good for me," she ended rather weakly.

"Then, why Aunt Matilda's rage?" inquired Tommy baldly.

Of the real reason—that her lover

was chasing Aunt Matilda's millions—Margot Hutton was ignorant; as she was ignorant that she had ever been a potential heiress.

"She can't bear him," she murmured. "But I was so frightfully lonely in Platon—and—"

"And you can't bear Platon," composedly. If Tommy meant the insinuation to be stinging, it was; for it happened to be true. Only plain loneliness had made the girl listen to George Milton's lovemaking.

Margot faced him with blazing eyes. "Tommy Bannister," she exploded, as if they were both children again, "you've no right to think that, much less say it! You were a nasty, rude boy when I last saw you, and you're worse now. If you think I should tell you I'm madly in love with George Milton, I don't."

"Neither do I," quietly. "Only I think you should look it if you're going to marry him. And you don't."

Words failed Miss Hutton. She did not love her parson, if she had only found it out to-night, but she would never own it; least of all, to Tommy Bannister. She cast a scathing glance at him, and moved toward the shut door of the garden.

"Going in?" asked Tommy. He was thinking hard. If he was an honorable person, he had put honor on the shelf, and was merely consulting expediency.

"Since we're doing nothing but quarrel I think I'd better."

But Miss Hutton had suddenly to wink away tears. She had been so happy half an hour ago, before Tommy Bannister had reminded her of all the nasty things she had left behind her; Platon, and Aunt Matilda crying with rage at her obstinacy, and—yes, George Milton with his persistency in wanting to marry her. Though, of course, she did want to marry George; at least, she had wanted to.

Tommy was suddenly at her side. He had seen his line of conduct, and was taking it.

"I've been a brute beast to you," he said simply; before she knew it he



He held her suddenly at arms' length.

held her hand humbly. "But you see I was raging at the thought of your marrying any man—except me."

"Except you!" gasped Margot. "Why, you didn't remember I was alive till to-night!"

"And as I can't"—Tommy had winced, but he continued placidly—"don't you think we might be friends for the two weeks you're going to be

here? You'll have all your life with your"—he gulped down "parson"—"your husband. Don't you think you might play round with me for the fortnight that's all *I'll* ever have of you?"

"Well," the girl began, "of all the colossal nerve—" But she suddenly caught Tommy's eyes, and began to laugh like a child. "Oh, Tommy, you're so funny," she gasped at last. "No-

body else but you would have thought I'd even speak to you again after the things you've said to me. And now to propose we should be *friends*," sentimentally.

"Seems to be all we ever can be, and half a loaf's better than no bread," returned the practical Tommy. "Besides, if you don't have a good time being my friend, I'll go and drown myself. Can you ride?" irreverently.

"I can."

"And swim?"

"Pretty well."

"Dance?"

Margot smiled.

"Well, we'll do 'em all," returned Mr. Bannister. "You mayn't be able to," significantly, "later on. Now come along and see Mrs. Dover's sticky old roses, and meet all the men who want to meet you." For Harcourt and the rest would be a help, not a hindrance, now that he had to deal with the Reverend George Milton.

To Margot Hutton the ensuing fortnight was one whirling dream of rapture; of roses, gaiety, riding, dancing—and Tommy Bannister. Being an honest-minded girl, she realized she might have had a success at Lake Aylmer without him, but also that that success would have been but a hollow show. He had kept his promise that she should enjoy herself; she did, in every golden minute. She would even have forgotten the existence of the Reverend George Milton, if he had not taken the most successful method of keeping himself in her memory. He never wrote her so much as a line. In spite of herself, in spite of remembering she did not really love him, Miss Hutton was queerly exercised about it. She had not heard from Teresa either, or from Aunt Matilda, but she never put the three things together. As for Tommy Bannister, since that first evening he had never referred to his successful rival; and it was odd that an aching thought that all his frank rudeness about her fiancé had been pretense troubled Miss Hutton in secret much more than that fiancé's incomprehensible silence. But Tommy's plans

for her amusement left her little time to reflect on either, till the very last night of her stay.

It was, to begin with, a lowering, thundery evening, hot and airless under an ominous sky; a fit setting to the melodramatic play Tommy had got up to tide over his last hours with the girl he was not even saying to himself he loved. For by now he loved her too much even to bear thinking of. It was not for her looks; there were days when he forgot her looks. It was herself he loved with all his soul and body, and after this one more evening he must stand aside and see her go back to another man.

It was dark in the country-club shrubbery as for the last time he walked with Margot Hutton down to the little open-air theatre where they were acting the play; black dark, in spite of the colored lights hung in the trees. Tommy took the girl's hand to lead her, and once more the soft satin of her gown brushed against his hand as he did it.

"Margot"—suddenly his voice startled her—"you'll be gone in the morning; I've got to speak! I didn't mean to—I swore I never would—but oh, can't you?" incoherently. "Can't you let the other go, and say yes to me?"

He felt her hand grip his, and fall slack again. "I—dear Tommy, I can't," she whispered.

"You could, if you cared!" Mrs. Dover was but three paces in front; he kept his voice under his breath.

"He—he trusted me," said Margot Hutton. "I can't do it, Tommy."

Tommy was silent. A flash of lightning made Mrs. Dover scream, but neither he nor Margot noticed.

"I suppose you can't," he muttered, and she hardly knew his voice. "You wouldn't be you if you could. But—the world would be very sweet, Margot!"

"I know."—She was almost speechless. He heard her catch her breath and try to go on.

"If you could have liked me, don't say so," he said roughly. "I've stood enough; I couldn't stand that."

"I know," said the girl again. "But if we were going to die to-night I'd say it."

"We're not, though," brutally. "We're going to live, without each other."

Margot stood still. "Don't stay by me this evening," she begged imploringly. "Keep away!"

"Keep away?" In the dark Tommy stared. "I've got to act with you. How can I keep away?"

"I'd forgotten." It was almost a cry, for she really had. "Oh," she whispered desperately. "I can't do it, now! Can't we leave our scene out?"

"Not without setting 'em all talking," bluntly. "I don't want to do it any more than you do. It used to half kill me even to rehearse it, but I thought you didn't care."

"Care!" But she caught herself up on the word. "I suppose we can scramble through the thing," she added wearily, "but afterward you've got to keep away from me. I'm a forswearer of oaths to George in my heart, Tommy," quaintly; "don't let me be one with my tongue."

"If you were," said the man heavily, "it would be a great deal more right than what you're doing. But since you don't see it that way, I won't try and make you. Only, it's the wrong way to marry a man. Come on; it's going to rain."

But it did not. It merely grew darker and hotter. The rustic theatre, that boasted only a roof over open sides, was baking as any brick one. The audience fanned themselves with discomfort, and vague uneasiness. Behind the scenes, where the dressing room and greenroom walls were solid, the breathless heat melted the make-up on the actors' faces, and the supply of iced drinks ran out.

"By George," muttered Harcourt, "there's awful thunder boiling up somewhere! I wish it would come and be done."

Tommy, waiting to go on in the scene that he dreaded, for did not Margot have to drag herself from his arms,

glanced through an open door on the pregnant darkness.

"If we could hurry this infernal show," he growled, "we might have time to get the women to the house before it does burst—and I'd feel easier. You cut out all you can, Harcourt. I'm only going to do half my scene with Miss Hutton."

"What for?" Harcourt stared. "We can't get wet here."

"We can get something else, though," dryly. "What fool ever put this cardboard theatre under one lone elm tree I don't know; but if the lightning strikes it, we're gone. And there's the first bad flash now."

Even in the walled-in greenroom it seared his eyes, and the thunder that came after it was so close as to sound like shattering china; but neither Harcourt nor the others would stop the play. The next flashes were less, but Tommy was calculating just where the great elm outside would be likely to fall as he went on to the stage to begin the love scene with Margot Hutton that would need no acting. He had to give her up to another man in it, which was just what he was doing. He moved to the girl's side as his part bade him, but his stilted speech of renunciation was never uttered.

A sword blade of lightning, blue, jagged, blinding, swept across the stage; and with it, so little was the interval, a crash as if the whole world were coming down on Tommy Banister's head.

The big tree was struck.

He had time to know it, time to wonder if his calculation about it were right, in the one second before he caught Margot Hutton in his arms and dragged her as close to the outside wall as they could press, shielding her with his strong young body from the great tree that was crashing through the roof. He was just in time. Though only the fringe of its branches struck them, it was to lash them breathless to the floor. It seemed hours to Tommy before he knew they were not pinned there by the raffle of smashed scenery, and that the fallen roof had settled

clear of them. For the rest the electric lights were out, the rain coming down in torrents on the ruined stage, and the women in the audience screaming. Tommy did not hear them in his awful relief that there was no fire anywhere.

Margot struggled to her feet, clutching his shoulder.

"Tommy," she panted, "speak to me! Are you hurt?"

"No," muttered Bannister. He did not mean to do it, but in the dark his arms closed round the girl, his lips found hers. And as they kissed each other something more alive, more vivid than the wild storm that raged over their heads lit in both their hearts. "Love," Tommy whispered, "little love!"

"Are we going to be killed?" Margot clung to him piteously. "Oh, I couldn't die, Tommy, after you'd kissed me!"

"We're going to live—at last," he answered hoarsely. He was in heaven, but he was practical still. Though he had matches in his pocket, he made no move to light one and pilot Margot through the branches, the bits of broken roof, and ruined scenery that separated her from Mrs. Dover. Never, now, thought he, could she go back to George Milton; but he had got to make sure. He held her suddenly at arms' length. "You've kissed me," he said. "You can't marry—him—after that!"

Unexpectedly he felt her start.

"I don't know," she said. "I'll tell him—I'll have to! If he doesn't want to marry me when he knows, I'll be free. If he does, I promised him, Tommy; I'll have to stick to it!"

She spoke bravely, honorably, as a girl sees honor; but to Tommy that kind of loyalty was incomprehensible, and wrong besides. He said not one single word in answer. He had thought she cared, and it was not true.



"Oh, Margot, it isn't going to kill you, is it?"

From the darkness in front of the smashed stage came the shrieks and shouts of the audience demanding if they were safe. Tommy called out reassuringly; but it was in dead silence that he got Margot out of the ruins and ran her up to the clubhouse where the rest of the assemblage were rushing pell-mell, soaked and bedraggled. But the first person his eyes fell on as he reached it was neither. His sister, very dry and tidy in her smart traveling dress, caught his arm as he came in.

"Teresa!" he gasped. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"Aunt Matilda's." Mrs. Alcott did not greet him, was not even looking at him. "Where's Margot?" she demanded. "I've been to the Dovers', and they said you were all here. I must see her before she goes home."

There was a queer excitement in

Teresa's manner. For a moment her brother suspected her, most unjustly, of having brought the Reverend George Milton with her. "Margot's behind me," he said briefly.

"Get her," returned Teresa. "I've a letter for her."

But Tommy stood still. If Teresa had not brought the Reverend George in person she had news from him, for the envelope in her hand was not one of Aunt Matilda's. It was the last irony of fate for Margot to hear from the man to-night. Tommy saw her pass him and kiss Teresa; and turned away.

"I've a letter," began Teresa, but she clutched at the girl's hand as she took it, and tried fumblingly to open it. "Wait," she cried sharply; she was suddenly frightened at what Aunt Matilda had done in spite of her and her journey. It was wicked, supposing Margot cared? She pulled the girl behind a screen. "Don't read it before any one."

For she had not been able to do one thing with Aunt Matilda. In spite of all her remonstrances, that angry old woman had cut Margot Hutton out of her will on account of her engagement to the Reverend George Milton, and sent for that gentleman and told him so. Perhaps she had been right about his unworthiness, after all, for at the news the manner she had called pomp-

ous fell from him like a withered leaf. He had retired gracefully, but he had retired. His fortnight's silence toward Margot had been but a roundabout way of preparing a girl who had no prospects for the letter Teresa had delivered to her to-night.

"I wish I'd never brought the thing," moaned Teresa, "but I couldn't bear you to go home without knowing. Oh, Margot, it isn't going to kill you, is it?"

For Margot, holding the letter from George Milton that had come at last, stood whiter than any girl could be who had read that letter and did not care. She clutched Teresa's arm as if she were going to fall.

"I want Tommy," she said.

"Tommy!" The bewildered Teresa stared. But Margot began to cry.

"You might have known what would happen when I saw him," she sobbed. "I really hated being engaged to George; I only stuck to him because I thought it was right. Go for—Tommy!"

Teresa went.

But as she saw her brother disappear behind the screens where Margot waited, the thought that rushed over her made her sit down weakly on the nearest chair. Aunt Matilda, for all her pains, had not disinherited Margot—for she had left her money to Tommy!



The Great Conspirator

By Howard Fielding

ILLUSTRATED BY F. X. CHAMBERLIN

[The first installment of this great mystery story appeared in the September number of this magazine.]

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK and I were anxious to go to the police station, though it did not clearly appear what we could do in Clinton's behalf. Mrs. Seabury prudently objected, and while the point was under discussion there came a telephone message from Cushing, telling us that Clinton would presently be released. The charge against him had been withdrawn, and he would merely be required to give sureties for his appearance as a material witness. We learned, further, that Clinton had not been arrested upon Quinn's instance, or the coroner's, but that the action against him had originated in the district attorney's office. He had been arrested on the basis of some rumor about the bullet, Mrs. Seabury said, and in the hope that he would make disclosures.

"Of course no one dreamed that he would have the bullet in his pocket," she added. "That was mere luck."

About one o'clock, Cushing returned, wearing upon his face the shrewd smile of a man who has played a game of skill and is pleased with himself.

"I've put the trouble off till morning," said he. "Quinn will be here at half-past eight."

"You boys would better go to bed," said Mrs. Seabury, and she dismissed us with her customary good night, always accompanied by little nods and gestures, quaintly constrained, signifying affection and supplying her own need of it.

Her suggestion was the wisest possible; there was nothing to be done,

and, presently, I got to bed, my mind full of that day which stretched behind me measuring like seven years. I could not pull the incidents together and set them on the dial of a clock; I seemed to be reviewing different periods of my life. Life itself was broader than I had supposed, and the emotional part of a man an instrument with a longer keyboard. Between dusk and midnight I had suffered and enjoyed many wonders, deeper despair than I had thought to exist, and nobler joy in love. Nature, like a foolish mother, had first whipped me for nothing and had then tossed me a rare gift which I did not deserve. Surely, I had many things worth thinking of, if my weary mind could have contained them; but they all slipped away into a void upon whose farther side I woke into the morning.

Mrs. Seabury was astir earlier than I, and it was she who told Sylvia of last night's unfortunate occurrence. Our affairs had now reached such a stage as to necessitate some change of attitude on Sylvia's part. She could no longer hold aloof from Mrs. Seabury; she was compelled to accept the externals of a truce. They were together in Mrs. Seabury's apartments when I went upon my earliest errand of that day, which was to seek for Sylvia.

Prompt to the hour of his appointment, Quinn arrived, accompanied by the assistant district attorney who had acted in the matter of Clinton's arrest, but this man took no share worth mentioning in the scene that followed. He sat in a corner of the room, a listener only. Cushing was present,

and Clinton, with Clifford Haynes, whom he supposed to be his counsel.

I saw clearly what I had perceived dimly yesterday, that Quinn was actuated by a personal feeling in addition to the sense of professional duty, which was very strong in him. I had always looked upon him as a man too kindly for his trade, but he seemed now to be urged on by active animosity, which he disguised so carefully that it became the more conspicuous. We had all come to know him two years ago, through some small matter, and I remembered how he used to salute Sylvia with a homage very well expressed, a Celtic reverence for beauty and the saintly state of young, unsullied womanhood, whenever they chanced to meet. It seemed unnatural that he should now be hunting her with malice, but I could not doubt it. Knowing something of the man's character, I was driven to accept a certain explanation; he had been approached in the early stages of this affair either by Mrs. Seabury—which was unlikely—or by some one whom he had taken to be her agent, and this assault upon his honesty had made him the enemy of us all.

Upon the facts in his possession he had the power to make trouble, but he seemed to have resolved upon a slow and cautious procedure, and to fear any hasty act, lest some trap set by Mrs. Seabury should be hidden there.

I learned presently that Clinton had made a statement at the police station, but not until after he had conferred with Haynes. He had not denied that the bullet found in his possession was the one which had caused Alice's death, but he said that it had been given to him by Mrs. Seabury for purposes of experiment and with the knowledge of Coroner Ritter. As Ritter was secretly in Mrs. Seabury's service, he would support this story.

"It seems that all this queer business has been in the experimental line," said Quinn. "Doctor Clinton tells me that directly after the crime now under investigation, he had a talk

with you, and that you said you had a suspicion as to the weapon that had been used. You asked him about such matters, he being an expert in firearms, more or less. You wanted to know what the bullet would look like, and he agreed to show you one which he would fire from a revolver of his own under conditions as near as possible to those in this case. Which he then went home to do, and you sent Mr. Deering to get it. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Seabury.

"And you didn't tell Mr. Deering that it wasn't the real bullet?"

"No."

"And neither did Clinton. Is that so, Mr. Deering?"

Jack answered truly:

"Yes. Nobody told me what that bullet was. I jumped to the conclusion that it was the real one. I gave it to you before I knew anything about any other."

"Then there was no substitution with intent to deceive," said Quinn. "But the real bullet came into your hands afterward. Here it is. Do you identify it?"

"I have no doubt it is the one," said Jack.

"Who found it?"

"I did," said Sylvia.

Quinn seemed to be surprised at her prompt answer.

"Why did you conceal it?" he demanded. "Why didn't you give it to me?"

Sylvia was driven to the only possible answer, and it seemed to please Aunt Frances.

"I thought Mrs. Seabury should have it."

"Why?"

"Because she would know what ought to be done, and I didn't."

At this, Aunt Frances nodded approvingly.

"And you passed it on to Mr. Deering, and he took the same view that you did."

"Precisely," said Jack.

"Miss Leland," said Quinn, "what key was that which you had in your handkerchief?"

"You mean the key of what door?" said she. "I don't know. You took it. I haven't seen it since."

"Are you aware that it was the key of the door between that corner sitting room and the adjoining room which had been assigned to Miss Warden?"

"No," said Sylvia.

"You didn't take it out of the door?"

"I did not."

At this it seemed to me that Jack was about to speak, but he changed his mind, and remained silent.

"Now, Miss Leland," said Quinn, "where did you go when you first came up to this floor after your arrival at the hotel?"

Sylvia glanced toward me. I tried silently to influence her not to tell Quinn the truth.

"To my own rooms," said she, "and then to the veranda."

"Nowhere else?"

"No."

Quinn rose heavily, and walked to the door.

"Send in that girl," said he, thrusting his head out into the hall.

A stout young Irish maid appeared, pitifully embarrassed and terrified. She had to think twice before she could give her name in response to Quinn's question, but we learned at last that she was Ellen Brady. With still greater difficulty she testified that she remembered the thunderstorm and the destruction of the flagstaff, which had frightened her very much. Some minutes prior to that occurrence, she had been in the corridor which led toward our wing of the house from the main building; and, looking across the hall and the stairwell, she had seen Miss Leland go into Miss Warden's room. She thought that it was before Miss Warden came upstairs.

The girl seemed to be telling the truth, to the best of her ability. I believed that she had seen some one enter that room, and that she really thought that it was Sylvia. Cushing asked her a few questions by way of cross-examination. Whom had she previously told of this occurrence? Two

other servants, her particular friends. Any one else? Yes; a reporter. She did not know his name. What did he look like? He was short and fat, and wore glasses. At this, Cushing desisted, and the girl was dismissed.

"Well, Miss Leland," said Quinn, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing more," responded Sylvia. "The maid must have seen Alice. We were dressed similarly."

"I am aware of that," said Quinn; and he turned to the subject of Sylvia's quarrel with Mrs. Seabury.

There is no doubt that Sylvia was frightened, and she had ample reason. Quinn's manner was not rude, but it was unmistakably menacing; he let it be seen clearly that he was questioning Sylvia as a suspected person. In this predicament she dared not show any animosity toward Mrs. Seabury; she was constrained to minimize their disagreement, but Quinn seemed well satisfied with her replies, doubtless because he knew that they could be disproved. Suddenly he broke off the examination, and announced that he would postpone all other points until our return from Philadelphia. He would like a few words with Mrs. Seabury in private, except for Cushing and the assistant district attorney, to whose presence there was no objection.

We withdrew accordingly, and Sylvia immediately separated herself from us because of the disfavor with which she now regarded Clinton. He seemed to feel this keenly, and to be tormented by many anxieties. When we had gone to my room, he spoke of his arrest as if it were an ineffaceable brand of disgrace, and he winced visibly at Haynes' jocular consolation.

"You've been promoted," said the lawyer. "You move now in a higher walk of life. There are few prominent Americans who haven't been arrested in one way or another, in these strenuous times, and the rest will all fall in. You're in grand company, my young friend. And you got off mighty easily," he added, in a more serious tone. "You have no right to com-

plain. I'm afraid it's going to be another matter with Miss Leland. The grand jury will be in session in a few days, and if they should indict her in the height of this popular excitement, the situation would be grave. Who the devil did this thing?" he demanded, suddenly turning to me. "Why don't you come out with the facts? I don't believe it was deliberate murder; I think the gun went off by accident in somebody's hands, and you're afraid to own it. Take my advice and go to Mrs. Seabury with the truth, especially if Miss Leland was the unfortunate party, or you're likely to see her go to jail for a long time, with no chance to get out or to be tried, or to do anything at all except sit there and grow old with the worry of it."

"We know nothing about the facts," said I.

"One of you *must* know," he retorted. "It's all in the family. The gun proves that."

"Clinton," said I desperately, "were you telling me the truth last evening? If you weren't, say so; and I'll go to Quinn before he gets away."

"The truth!" he said hastily. "Oh, yes; yes. Don't make any mistake, Seabury. It won't do."

"That maid's testimony looks bad," said Haynes. "If the two girls had an interview just before the shooting, it will seem as if they quarreled. Any love affairs mixed up in this? I hope not, for I've noticed that a Jersey jury always convicts when it can be shown that the accused was in love with anybody."

"Mr. Haynes," said I, relying upon him partly as a lawyer and more as one who was in Mrs. Seabury's confidence, "do you really believe that Miss Leland stands in serious peril?"

"Good heavens, my boy, what are you talking about?" he cried. "Why do you suppose Quinn wanted to confer with your aunt? He's protesting now against Miss Leland's leaving this town, and if he had one inch more ground to stand on, he'd arrest her this morning. It's a great case; his reputation is at stake. He's a kind of a so-

cialist, that fellow; he hates the rich in general, and financiers in particular. He's fighting Frances Seabury under the eyes of the whole nation, and I'm not exaggerating when I say that he'd rather win the battle than have her money, every dollar of it. He will never, never let go of this case as long as he's alive."

I was presently called into Mrs. Seabury's room, and her first words confirmed a part of Haynes' opinion.

"Well, I've had a fight and gained my point," said she. "I've saved Sylvia for the present. She may go with us to-day, but we'll have to take one of Quinn's men along."

"To watch Sylvia?"

"Yes," said she, "but he won't do any harm. I have stipulated for a decent, quiet man who will stay in his proper place. And now," she proceeded, "I have an errand for you. We must get this matter of Quinn's visit into the papers in the right way, and I haven't a minute's time to see the reporters. I think Mr. Lynde will do it for me; he is an unusually reliable person. Tell him to give out this interview to all the papers; he'll know how to manage it. Quinn may contradict me on some points, but a contradiction never enlightens the public very much. Let Mr. Lynde say that at my request Captain Quinn called upon me this morning, and that I am very much gratified by the diligence and ability which he has displayed. Put in a good word, also, for anybody else who is meddling with the affair—the district attorney's people, Doctor Ritter, and so forth. Mrs. Seabury is in complete harmony with the local authorities, and hopes for a speedy solution of this distressing mystery. Important developments may be expected soon, but at present it would be unwise to speak more explicitly. Now this sounds commonplace to you, Arthur; but remember how commonplace the people are. Give them what they're accustomed to, and they'll make the less trouble. Oh, and you'd better have Mr. Lynde say a word or two about my grief; for I really am grieved, Ar-



A few of the reporters who were on the watch succeeded in jumping off without serious accident.

thur, far more than you suppose. I was very fond of Alice, and had made excellent plans for her future. Better make some notes of this, or you'll forget it. I want to contradict the stories of a lack of harmony between Sylvia and myself. Say that I am sustained in this affliction by the love and confidence of all of you. There, I guess that will do."

"But if I don't find this man?" said I.

"You *must* find him. This is important, Arthur. Don't let there be any failure."

I went at once to the Hotel Donaldson, where the Lyndes were living, and had the good fortune to encounter Mrs. Lynde before I had made any inquiries. She informed me that her husband had

gone out; but she could not tell me where he was, nor name an hour when he would be likely to return. To find him in the short time at my disposal seemed a task beyond my intelligence, and when I had escorted Mrs. Lynde to the foot of the stairs, I walked slowly out to the veranda and sat down, pretending to myself that I was planning a pursuit.

A bellboy came and stood beside my chair.

"Mr. Seabury," said he softly, "do you remember me, sir?"

"Why, yes," said I; "you were at the Eglinton last year."

"George is my name," he continued. "I heard what the lady said to you just now."

"Indeed?"

"You always treated me well, sir," said he; "as well as you could afford, I'm sure—you not being any too flush, as I figured it—and I'd like to do you a favor."

"Perhaps I ought to warn you that I'm not any too flush at this moment," said I.

"I'll take a chance," he replied, and glanced over his shoulder. "The lady was stringing you. I don't know why; that's none of my business. No more do I know what you were after; but here's the facts. Her husband left last evening. I don't believe they know it in the office, but I do. I judge he took the last train for Philadelphia; he had a bag with him. And he went very private. Now, if that's worth anything to you——"

I discharged the obligation to the best of my ability, and hurried back to the Eglinton with my news.

Mrs. Seabury, except in her affectionate mood, was very hard to read. The emotions which she disclosed had often no relation to her true state of feeling. Sylvia had once said that Aunt Frances fibbed to her own face and made it believe her. Upon the present occasion she seemed distressed because I had overpaid the bellboy, and she called my attention to the fact that I had already obtained his information at the time of payment, a circumstance

which should materially have reduced the price. Yet she reimbursed me with unusual promptitude, and did not suggest merely crediting my account with the item.

She was quite capable of being disturbed by this pecuniary transaction, yet I suspected that there was much more in the matter—more, indeed, than the overthrowing of her arrangements about the interview. I ventured to guess that there was something in this business which she did not understand. The man, as I knew, was in her pay, and, as she herself had said, he was exceptionally "reliable"; yet he had evaded her with some veiled purpose of his own. This, and his secret going, and his wife's falsehood, were very proper elements of suspicion.

It was now time that we should go to the railroad station. The body of our friend, sealed finally from human eyes, was gone already. As to our destination, the morning papers of Philadelphia had printed full accounts in advance; we were to arrive at such an hour, proceed to the Seabury mansion by such a route, and thence, after the rites, continue on to a certain cemetery where the grave waited; and although the papers had honestly accompanied their news with the hint that it came direct from Mrs. Seabury, I had no doubt that the announcements were substantially correct.

There had been some discussion among us as to what Alice's desire would have been. It may be remembered that the word "grave" was legible in that bit of writing whose purport was still unguessed, unless by Clinton, who had declined to tell me his belief. I had thought that the word might have some reference to a spot where she had wished to rest, but Mrs. Seabury had expressed a different belief. "Grave" was used commonly by Alice in the sense of "serious," and it was possible that she might have tried to frame a question about her injury. Her father's bones were in the ocean, and her mother's resting place I understood to be a long way off to the westward. Members of her family

slept in the cemetery which had been named, and it seemed best that she should mingle her dust with theirs.

Mrs. Seabury had provided a private car, in which we left Cape May, and in a corner of it sat the man assigned by Quinn to attend Sylvia. The chief's word surely was made good in this person. He must have been a kind of specialist in decency of deportment and attire; and he was so quiet that a hush seemed to radiate from him, oppressing all our voices.

Sylvia knew the reason of his presence, and she told me frankly that she was afraid.

"I am no heroine to endure this," she said. "The end is too plain. I shall be in prison within a few days, unless something is done to prevent it. And if I go, even for a little while, what chance will there be afterward that I can find out the truth about my father? Mrs. Seabury will have had time to cover everything up. Arthur, isn't it plain that she is doing this, or at least permitting it willfully?"

"I can't believe it," said I. "She will never permit you to be charged with this. She intimated to me very clearly——"

I checked myself, remembering that Aunt Frances had pledged me to silence before uttering that mysterious oracle which I had subsequently taken to refer to myself.

"What did she intimate to you?" said Sylvia.

"She bound me not to tell," I answered. "Wait. I will speak to her."

Mrs. Seabury and Jack were talking earnestly in whispers. I broke in upon them, and sent Jack to Sylvia.

"Aunt Frances," said I, "this situation is unbearable. Why need it continue? You told me yesterday that you knew how Alice came to her death. It seems to me that you must wish to save Sylvia from this position——"

"And that I ought to tell what I believe," she interposed. "Is that it? How do you know that it would save Sylvia if I should?"

"You don't believe that Sylvia did this, aunty," said I, trying to move her

by the manner she preferred. "Why do you let us all suffer in this way? You are the only one who can do anything."

I saw that I had pleased her. She answered me more gently.

"There are miracles that even I can't perform," she said; "not to order, as it were; not in a minute, Arthur. I may know more than I can prove. Leave it to me; and assure Sylvia that I will save her in the last resort. Perhaps she'd better come and talk with me. I'll try to reassure her. Let her come right away. There's not much time."

"When are we due in Camden?"

"We're not due in Camden, nor in Philadelphia, either," said she. "I detest crowds. I suppose there are a thousand people outside my house already, and five thousand at the cemetery. There are always plenty of idle people, wondering why somebody else has got the money. Let them waste their time; they were born to do it; it's their profession, so to speak. Now do my errand, Arthur, like a good boy." And she raised her hand in a patting gesture, very common with her, though she rarely touched any of us when she could avoid it.

I returned to Sylvia with my message.

"I must go to her," said she. "Loss of my freedom now, or even to be watched and followed everywhere, would destroy all my hopes. I would ally myself with Satan to escape it."

After Sylvia was gone, Jack talked to me in a very cheerful strain. The course lay straight before us now, in his opinion. All that we had to do was to attack the mystery with undivided energy, and solve it. We were no longer restrained by fears.

"Have you any light?" I asked. "Have you even a guess?"

"There's a point," said he. "It looks to me as if somebody must have had another revolver of the same pattern as mine."

"Then why has yours disappeared?"

"Well," he admitted, "I haven't come to that yet. But it could be explained.

There's nothing impossible about it," and he soared aloft upon Icarian wings.

We had left Cape May as the last segment of a regular train in the forward parts of which there were many reporters; but at a station beyond Woodbury our car was uncoupled, at the instant when the engine started. A few of the reporters who were on the watch succeeded in jumping off without serious accident, but their devotion to duty was fruitless. Another engine seized us, and we were drawn back with great speed to the environs of Woodbury. Carriages were waiting at a designated spot, and we rode rapidly to a pretty little cemetery which had a chapel within its gates.

"Her mother is buried here," said Mrs. Seabury. "I guess very few knew of it. I circulated information that her grave was in the West."

A very small company of those whom we had wished to be present were waiting in the chapel, but there were not above two score of the idle whom Mrs. Seabury abhorred, outside the high gates of iron which closed behind our carriages.

"This is much pleasanter," Mrs. Seabury averred; "much nicer, on all accounts. It cost me something to stop the leaks in the matter of permits and other legal nuisances, but I don't begrudge the money. I wouldn't let this poor child be followed to her rest by howling mobs."

For one moment Sylvia forgot her enmity, and turned to Mrs. Seabury as in the old days.

"And her mother is here!" she said. "Is this where Alice used to go on those mysterious little journeys? She never told me."

"She was a very quiet girl about her own business," said Mrs. Seabury. "There were signs of capacity in Alice. You mustn't think I didn't appreciate her. Don't cry," she added. "You can't afford to weaken yourself by giving way." And she gently patted the air quite near to Sylvia's shoulder.

Before the altar, in the cool and dusky chapel, lay the body of our friend. We gathered in the very fore-

most seats, not filling them, there were so few of us. The emptiness seemed vast, even in so small a place. This, and the peculiar darkness, and perhaps the furtive manner of our coming, filled me with a kind of shame, a sense of stealth and wrong. I was continually oppressed by the desire to look behind me, and I knew that Sylvia suffered with the same nervous terror. I knew that she resisted, and must still at intervals cast a glance backward. So she became aware, and I, too, guided by her eyes, of Quinn's man in the darkest corner, effaced to a mere outline in the shadows.

A white-haired clergyman, with an unwrinkled countenance, his skin translucent and the color of ivory, read the pure English of the service very sweetly and with faultless intonation; and, in my fancy, those words so well conceived and fittingly pronounced, in some degree supplied the place of kindred to the dead. Alice had passed her youth in an unusual seclusion, with cultivated, simple folk of good descent, and her speech had suffered little from the mongrel echoes of the day. She came now to her rest attended by not one that had a drop of blood akin to hers, but at least there was a home sound in this voice that bade her sleep.

Near the conclusion of the service, a man who seemed to be employed about the cemetery came tiptoe upon squeaking shoes to where we sat, and whispered something to Aunt Frances, who went out with him just as the last words were pronounced. Beset as I was by many apprehensions, I saw cause for alarm in this incident, and some minutes later, when Mrs. Seabury joined us by the grave, I scanned her face anxiously for any sign of trouble. Beyond question she was under a pressure of self-restraint which could be apprehended only by one who knew something of her weaknesses and her extraordinary strength which dominated them. She was more affected than when we were in the chapel, where the influences had been tinged with spiritual detachment. Interment is direct and practical; it is something that

is done and that the eye beholds—the grim significance of dust to dust made visible. I observed that Mrs. Seabury resolutely looked above the scene, at the tops of the low evergreens and the sullen cloud bank in the western sky. She leaned upon my arm with an appreciable weight, and when we walked away she took the first steps haltingly.

"I have received a message which will make it necessary for me to go to Philadelphia," she said, "and I guess you'll have to come along. No," she added, after a pause: "I think you'd better wait till later."

She gave me the hour of the train that I must take. She herself would leave Woodbury within half an hour, and we should meet in her office in the trust company's building at half-past seven. I went with her to a carriage, and she rode away, parting the crowd that now numbered some hundreds, gathered by the rumor of our presence.

CHAPTER XIX.

I stood for a few minutes looking out through the black skeleton of the gate with a feeling of hostility which puzzled me. There seemed to be a



Quinn's man in the darkest corner, effaced to a mere outline in the shadows.

reason for it which I had forgotten, and I searched in my mind as for a name that has escaped the memory. A crowd is such a strange thing, fantastically miscellaneous, even the individuals not single; for, though many races may be packed into one skin, it is the law that they shall not unite, but merely touch at their edges. They are a physical mixture, never a chemical compound; and to the seeing eye the markings of the different bloods are as distinct upon a face as are the squares upon a checkerboard.

But why should this familiar thought

affect me with a kind of terror mingled with resistance? I have no natural right to be an enemy of the people.

A very courteous voice asked me a question, and I understood the speaker to be one of those reporters who had jumped from the train. I merely shook my head, still staring at the crowd. Under extreme compulsion, I can express a simple thought with more or less inaccuracy in three languages, but the supply seemed insufficient for that audience; and yet I was disposed to oblige the pleasant fellow who had addressed me.

In that instant, however, the explanation of my mental state came to me; I had been looking upon these people as Sylvia's accusers. Of such must they be, if it should come to that. The officers of justice, the grand jury, the judge, the lawyers, the twelve bipeds in the box would be no less discordant in their natures than this company before the gates; and Sylvia's fate would rest upon the hazard of a merely verbal concurrence of certain individuals whose thought could never be the same. For which of them could attain agreement even between the separate selves in the divided house of his own brain?

I was turning away, when some one called my name, and I saw, with an intense surprise, the portly form of Gilbert Norris, my aunt's executive officer in the trust company, plowing a devious path in my direction. At my request, an attendant let him in, and we shook hands with some cordiality on his part, whence I inferred that he was troubled in his mind, and not so sure of himself as usual.

"Where is Mrs. Seabury?" he asked. I told him she was gone, and could not now be overtaken; her private car would start immediately upon her coming. Where was the car? I did not know; not at the station, surely. He looked at his watch.

"The next train leaves in about forty-five minutes," said he, and glanced toward one of the shady and deserted paths. We moved in that direction.

"I've got a little out of touch with Mrs. Seabury," he said. "It's a time

for caution, on various accounts, and telephones occasionally leak. A very sad affair, this murder; it has naturally overshadowed other matters. I refer particularly to the bond robbery. Have you any opinion as to that?"

"I haven't thought of it for one moment since I first heard that it had happened," I replied.

"You were present when Wickham brought the news, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"What was his manner? How did he impress you?"

"Very unfavorably. Still, I am unwilling to believe—"

"I've had the man watched," he interposed. "What would you say if I should tell you that he seems to be getting ready to slip away?"

"That would nearly settle it," said I. "There could hardly be any other reason."

"And Dalton's gone already. If Wickham should try to skip, it would look like a partnership, wouldn't it?"

"It would."

"I can't see into it," said he, with a puzzled manner. "If the bonds had merely been stolen, I'd say that Wickham did the trick, with Dalton's help, and I'd come pretty near knowing how it was done. But, as you're aware, there was a bogus package substituted. That means premeditation, while my theory indicates sudden impulse, depending upon an accident."

"What is your theory?"

He stroked his chin doubtfully.

"Has Mr. Deering said anything to you about this robbery?" he asked. "Has he pointed out any oddity—any coincidence?"

"No; he thinks Wickham innocent. That's all he's said to me."

"Mr. Seabury, I'm going to tell you something in confidence. You won't mention it? Very well; this is it. About a week ago, in the trust building, I heard Mr. Deering talking to Mrs. Seabury about those bonds, in her little room back of mine—not the office on the top floor, of course. There seemed to be some question of her intrusting them to him; I don't know for

what purpose; it was none of my business. But at that moment Wickham passed through my room, and knocked at Mrs. Seabury's door, which was open just a crack. I think he heard more than I did. And it's those very bonds that are gone. Wickham was familiar with the packet; he could have made the duplicate easily enough. Did he plan to take them from Mr. Deering, and subsequently take them from Mrs. Seabury?"

"That's beyond me," said I; "but where does Dalton come in?"

"The robbery was finally committed in Mrs. Seabury's business room, at her residence," said Norris. "For some reason, she didn't give the bonds to Mr. Deering; she took them home with her. I figure that the trick was done while the securities were being checked up, at the house. In fact, it must have been."

"Why not on the way from the house to the trust company?"

He smiled.

"Wickham doesn't travel on such errands altogether alone," said he. "You may take my word that he didn't do anything on that trip. There was an eye on him, whether he knew it or not; and I guess he had his suspicions. No; the substitution occurred in that room."

"There was an eye on him there, sure enough," said I, "the sharpest in any human head."

"You mean Mrs. Seabury's," said he, "and you're quite right. He had a terrible nerve to do anything there. But he *must* have done it; there's no other explanation. Let's suppose that he did. Very well; the trick is played; the bogus bonds are on the table; the real ones are in Wickham's pocket. I guess the fellow wouldn't have been very comfortable, sitting there under the eyes of Frances Seabury. Those bonds would have been rather hot; they'd have burned through into his body, if I'm any judge. Now, suppose that he should see a sudden chance to make himself safe by sacrificing part of the plunder—anything up to a half of it, we'll say. Wouldn't he have taken that chance? I hadn't thought of this

so clearly before; it's come to me right here; and I believe it's straight. It accounts for everything."

"What do you mean?" said I. "I don't understand."

"Mr. Deering came into that room with his traveling bag. He opened it on a chair right beside that table. He talked with Mrs. Seabury, and doubtless deflected her attention. Suppose Wickham took his chance, and slipped the bonds into that bag?"

"But how was he to get them out again?"

Norris put on a shrewd look.

"Was there a cab in front of the door at that time?" he asked.

"Yes; to take our hand baggage."

"And Dalton was to ride in it?"

"With a maid."

"It wouldn't have been hard to fool a maid. She doesn't count. Wickham knew that the cab was there, and why?"

"I suppose so," said I. "It was there when he came; and he talked with Dalton."

"Exactly. And now, tell me: Did you ever know a man who hated to be poor so much as Dalton does? It was written on his face; and Wickham knew him well. Mr. Seabury, that thing happened just as I've outlined it. Wickham put those bonds into Mr. Deering's bag, and bargained with Dalton to take them out again. Dalton did it, and got clean away. Whether the spoil has been divided, I don't know; but the ground is getting too hot under Wickham's feet, and he's going to run, if I don't stop him."

"Can the bonds be negotiated?"

"Easily; by a man of Wickham's capacity. They can't be handled openly, of course. And now, Mr. Seabury, tell me whether I've figured this thing out. Has anybody else explained Dalton's flight?"

I was silent; inattentive, in fact. A thought had come to me that dwarfed the bond robbery to insignificance.

"Mr. Norris," said I, "let me carry your theory a step or two farther. Suppose that Dalton could not open the bag in the cab; that he failed to play any trick upon the maid. The bonds

would have remained. And when we got to the station in Philadelphia, Jack and I took our bags, and never let go of them afterward. You discovered the robbery almost instantly, and Wickham caught our train. He kept himself hidden; he talked with Dalton at Cape May and learned that the bonds had not been secured, that they were still in the bag; and he found out where it was."

Norris uttered a queer whistling sound, and then his mouth fell open.

"That was the grip you put the revolver into!" he said, in a hushed voice. "But wait; it wasn't loaded."

"The cartridges were in a little bit of paper," said I. "They were sticking out through it into plain sight. It doesn't take a second to slip a cartridge into that revolver. It must have slid under something while Jack was carrying the bag downstairs, and so he didn't see it; but when Wickham, at the window in Cape May, felt for the bonds, his hand touched the revolver and the cartridges. It must be so. They're gone."

"By George, you've got it!" exclaimed Norris. "The whole game; everything! The man thought he was shooting Mrs. Seabury, and he had a double reason. I'll tell you another thing, in confidence again: This fellow Wickham is a crook; he was under suspended sentence for the larceny of valuable papers when Mrs. Seabury took him up—against my protest. So she had two holds on him, and it was a lifetime in prison that he saw coming toward him through that room. He shot; they always do. Well, this ends Mr. Wickham. I'll get to a telephone as quickly as I can, and call up my detective in Philadelphia, and we'll have our man very quietly put behind the bars. Any charge will do, to hold him on. One thing is sure; whether we're right or wrong about the murder, this man mustn't get away."

He glanced at his watch hastily.

"I must go. Don't say too much about this."

"I shall say nothing to any one except Mr. Deering and Miss Leland."

"Well," he said, with hesitation, "that won't do any harm, if you caution them against talking. Good-by. This has been a profitable half hour. You carry something under your hat, Mr. Seabury; brains, sir, of a very superior quality. Good-by." And we joined our hands, that were unsteady with excitement.

He hurried away, leaving me dazed, and chiefly conscious of a savage joy. All pity for Wickham, all proper feeling toward a man so far misled, were swallowed up in vanity and triumph. Norris' prompt, unquestioning acquiescence and his praise had turned my head, and I forgot that his opinion was of no particular importance. He had always impressed me as a safe and solid man, difficult to convince, slow to act. I must, indeed, have done something wonderful to open Norris' mind in this sudden fashion, and to set him running on a hot day to execute my judgment.

For once my wish was father to my thought. It seemed to me that Sylvia was saved, and that my own share in it had been considerable. I did not reflect that Norris had been entirely out of his sphere; that he knew nothing about criminal investigation; and that he had disclosed a plain prejudice against Wickham. I was cooled only by the fear that I should tell my story to Sylvia and Jack in that distressing style of veiled self-praise which is the harrowing temptation of the personally dissatisfied, in whom sheer weariness of their own poor qualities excites an uncontrollable impulse to seem different in just one episode of their lives. They are like the wretched girl cursed with an ugly countenance, who cannot pass a mirror without a stealthy glance, hoping for a single presentation of herself that will not be so cruel.

I met Sylvia and Jack returning from a lesser gate whence the few friends who had come down from Philadelphia had now departed. Ten paces to the rear Quinn's man walked soberly along, bestowing an occasional glance upon the monuments of the dead, but never one upon Sylvia. She was paler than

I had ever seen her, and I thought she turned her eyes to me as if for rescue. It would have been my wish to tell her everything in a word; but my story, to be comprehensible, must be told in proper sequence. I began to tell it, as calmly as I could, but I had got no farther than the mention of Wickham's name when Jack stopped me.

"Hold on," said he. "Where has Norris gone? What is he going to do?"

"Wickham is planning to get away," said I. "Norris will stop him."

"Stop him? How?"

"Arrest him," said I. "Norris will telephone to his detective agency in Philadelphia——"

"Oh, my good Lord!" groaned Jack. "You don't mean that?" And he started on a run down the path, calling over his shoulder: "You'll find me in the superintendent's house by the gate."

I turned to Sylvia, stupidly.

"What does this mean?" said I.

"He doesn't want Wickham to be arrested," said she. "He will telephone to some one in Philadelphia that it mustn't be done."

"But why? Jack can't know anything to justify him in such an action. Sylvia, this is more important than you imagine. The bonds are a very small matter in themselves, but the theft of them may have led to something infinitely worse. There is reason to believe that it was Wickham who shot Alice."

My abruptness was thoroughly masculine and brutal. It was as if I had thrust a picture of the crime before Sylvia's eyes. She shrank, and lifted up her hands, as if to cover her face.

"I don't think it was Wickham," she said, in a faint voice. "I don't see how he could have done it."

"It's hard to see how any sane person could have done it, while I was there," said I. "Yet somebody did. Wickham seems to be planning flight, and certainly we can't afford to let him get away at such a time as this. If

Jack interferes, I think he'll make a mistake."

"Let us find Jack," said she, and we made haste along the path toward the gate, while Quinn's man followed at an equal pace, and yet avoided any semblance of pursuit. Presently, as we crossed the carriageway, we saw, through an open window, Jack in a corner of a bare room waiting by a telephone. When we entered, he waved a hand to us in sign of silence, and then spoke into the transmitter, but received no answer.

"I've called up Duncan Hadley," said he, adding, for Sylvia's information: "He runs a private detective agency, and usually does the trust company's work in that line."

"Hadley won't do anything for you, Jack," said I. "You'd better let me talk to him. We must find out what he knows, first."

"It's the other way about," Jack rejoined. "He must find out what I know. That's the point. Hello! Is that Hadley's Agency? Is he there? Personal. I want to speak to Mr. Hadley himself." He turned to me. "Where's Quinn's man? Not under that window, perhaps?"

"No; he's across the way."

"I wish you'd keep an eye on him. This may be somewhat confidential."

"Why won't this detective do anything for Jack?" asked Sylvia of me. "What did you mean by that?"

"Our engineer at the trust company has a half-witted son who stole some brasswork out of the cellar," I replied. "Hadley arrested him, and was not quite so gentle as he should have been. Jack laid a hand on Hadley not in the way of kindness, and though it was a very mild affair, the man holds his grudge."

"Hello!" said Jack. "Mr. Hadley? I am Mr. Deering. I am in Woodbury. Have you just received a message from Mr. Norris? I know all about it. Yes; I know what he told you to do; but don't do it. He told you to arrest Wickham. No, sir; not on your life. Mrs. Seabury doesn't wish it done. You've sent a man out

on it? Well, send another after him. This is important, Mr. Hadley." A long pause. "I understand all that perfectly. Wickham is scared, that's all. If he meditates getting away, tell him not to do it till he's talked with me, and then he won't want to." Another pause. "Do you mean to say that you refuse to take these instructions from me? You'll make a big mistake if you do." And again he listened, with rising excitement; but when he spoke, his voice was steady. "Mr. Hadley, I am perfectly certain that Mrs. Seabury does not wish to have this thing done. If I could reach Mr. Norris, I could persuade him in half a minute to countermand his order to you; but he's got away. I didn't see him here. He is not in possession of the facts."

He listened again, and then swung round on his stool toward us.

"This is the deuce of a situation," he whispered. "What shall I do? Could you talk him out of it, Arthur?"

"On what ground?" said I. "With what argument? I believe Wickham got the bonds, and I'm pretty sure Aunt Frances wouldn't want him to get away."

"This calls my hand," said Jack. "I took the bonds myself. I don't object to telling you; I was going to do it, anyhow. But have I got to tell Hadley? He'll find means to spread the news all over Philadelphia. Yet, if there's no other way, it must be done,

I stole the bonds, but I can't top that job by stealing Charley Wickham's liberty—not one minute of it."

He turned toward the telephone, but Sylvia covered the transmitter with her hand.

"No!" she said. "You shall not do it. I know why you took the bonds. I love you for it. You're more my brother than you were before. Arthur, don't let him speak. Talk to this man

yourself, and force him to obey you."

I had no clear comprehension of what I was doing, but I would have stopped the main-spring of the solar system if Sylvia had asked me to, in that tone of voice. What I need, in a practical conversation, is to be waked up, so that I really want something. I fail, as a rule, because I can't care. But there was no such trouble in the present instance; I addressed Detective Hadley from my heart, and he was impressed. He thought I knew what I was talking about, but if he understood my reasons, he

had the better of me in that. At any rate, I won him over, and I had the satisfaction of hearing him give an order to a subordinate for the prevention of the arrest.

"Now, Jack," said I, "what is this all about? I don't believe you took the bonds."

"But I did, though," said he, "and I wish I could tell you about it without seeming to offer excuses."

"You can't hide them from me," said



He turned toward the telephone, but Sylvia covered the transmitter with her hand.

Sylvia. "They are very plain. You did this to save Arthur, and not at all for yourself—not for the money in the least, but to prevent an injury that all the money in the world couldn't have repaired. You went to Mrs. Seabury and told her the truth, and asked her to help you, for Arthur's sake. And she wouldn't do it, out of all her millions. So you compelled her; you took what she so cruelly refused; and I am glad you did."

My rusty and old-fashioned conscience fairly groaned at this; and, moreover, I had a powerful suspicion that Sylvia, for all her fervor in Jack's cause, was more unjust to him than I.

"There is more in this than Sylvia sees," I said. "You didn't take those bonds merely because you needed them, or because my doughnut of a head seemed to be losing the hole which stands in it for a mind. You had some valid claim upon the bonds. I happen to know that you had asked Aunt Frances for them. Did she promise them to you? By Jove, she did! And on the strength of it you made the move that swamped us. Isn't that true?"

Jack gave a quick dash at his hair.

"I can't sit here and justify myself at the expense of Aunt Frances, after I've robbed her," said he. "That looks rather yellow, to me. She always keeps her word to the last penny. If she'd really promised me the bonds, I should have had them. I must have been mistaken about it."

"You know that you weren't," said I.

"Well, I'll say this," said he, with something like his usual spirit, "I thought I was right at the time. It seemed to me that she had put me into a position where somebody *had* to be robbed. If I didn't take the bonds, the things that I had done in the expectation of getting them would be no better than robbery, and there'd be actual loss to the parties concerned, which loss Aunt Frances would undoubtedly pay, in the end. But if I did take the bonds, nobody would lose a cent, for I should use them only as collateral, and even Aunt Frances herself didn't pretend to deny that our

game must win if we could hold on for a little while. So the choice seemed to lie between actually stealing from Aunt Frances, and only going through the motions. And, besides, I was a little worried about Arthur, and perhaps not quite as cool as I might otherwise have been.

"Sylvia," he went on, "this boy has just insulted his own mind, but you have no conception of the load that I had put on it. Add the fourth dimension to the square of the circle and multiply it by perpetual motion; that was my scheme of credit for our speculation. It was so complicated that it staggered even Aunt Frances, when I went to her in desperation, after I had made up my mind that Arthur must be pulled out of it somehow. I didn't tell her all, but only the simplest part; and she put up her hand to her forehead and looked at me under it in the pose of the Indian hunter. 'For mercy's sake,' she said, 'how did you ever think this thing out?' She seemed to have a kind of admiration for me, on account of it. And Arthur was carrying all that, and about four times as much more, in his head every day at his desk, and every night when he lay down to sleep. That kind of puzzle work comes easy to me, but I give you my word that there were days when I didn't dare to put it down on paper and look at it all in one bunch. I was afraid it would scare me to death. Oh, my scheme of credit was no child's play; it was full-grown finance in everything except the size of the figures, and Aunt Frances seemed to view it with respect. She scolded me, of course, but, upon the whole, the scene was so much easier than I had expected that perhaps my head was turned a bit. I went away with the impression that everything was all right, but it wasn't."

"She wouldn't give them to you," said Sylvia. "She didn't wish you to make money. She would rather you would lose, even at some cost to her, so that she might hold you in dependence. That is her love for you; I mean it seriously."

This was so severe, and at the same time so probable, that it made me wince for Aunt Frances, as if I had seen her hurt.

"And you got the bonds," said I hastily, "and used them for collateral. That's why the brokers carried us. Who holds the stuff now?"

"Old Harry may know," he answered. "I don't. I never used the bonds for any purpose. They're gone; vanished. The express company lost them."

"What?" I cried. "Was that the package, the thing that somebody shipped to Marjorie Vannard?"

"I guess it was," said he.

"But how did Dalton get it?"

"Let us hear first how Jack got it," Sylvia interposed. "I want to understand this, if I can. How did you take them, Jack?"

"Why, easily enough," said he nervously. "It was a bit of parlor magic, mingled with the green-goods industry. First, I made a substitute packet, at the trust—a big envelope and some sheets of paper—that was the green-goods part of it, and I did it very well, too, for an amateur. Oh, this is awful. I don't believe I can tell it."

"Go on, man," said I. "At the worst, this is a piece of conduct; it's not you."

"Well," said he, "I bought another suit case, just like mine and yours. Of course, I couldn't take it home in plain sight, so I got a pasteboard box that would hold it."

"At your shirtmaker's," said Sylvia, remembering the scene in the automobile.

"No; that was a lie," said he. "I got the box and the wrapping paper at the store where I bought the bag; I happened to see them there, under a counter. And that's where coincidence took a hand in the affair. The box and the paper had contained a variety of things purchased by Miss Vannard in Philadelphia that afternoon. She had intended to have them sent to Steward's Hotel, and had written her name and the address upon the wrap-

per, when she changed her mind altogether, gave up the notion of going to Steward's, and decided to take a train for Cape May. She went to that trunk and bag store and bought a suit case, and packed the things into that. Thus I fell heir to her discarded possessions and her name—which I didn't see until the occasion when Aunt Frances lit on me about it.

"Not in the trunk store, but elsewhere, I put the bag into the box, and wrapped it up; and on the night before we left Philadelphia I packed both bags, the new and the old, so that they would look alike when opened. The outside of them I'd already attended to. I took the new one—I guess; for I could hardly tell them apart, myself—to the little room back of the library where no one goes; and I hid the box and the paper there, also. So far, so bad. We come now to the last hour. Aunt Frances and Wickham were checking up the securities, and of course I knew Aunt Frances well enough to picture the scene. All the stuff would be spread out on top of the table, like the cards in some great game of solitaire, a condition very suitable to my purpose.

"I got the bag from the den behind the library and set it on one of those shelves covered by a curtain, at the side of the passage that leads to the business room. Then I went upstairs and got the other bag."

"The one that I had put the revolver in," said I.

"Well, perhaps," said he doubtfully, "though I still can't help thinking that you must have put it into your own. For I took that grip of mine straight to the business room, and opened it there, and I didn't see any revolver."

"Yet it may have been there," insisted Sylvia. "I think it was. What was uppermost in the bag?"

"Pajamas," he replied.

"It may have got under them," said she. "You can't be sure."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't know," said he; "but that's another matter. I made a plausible

excuse for opening the bag in Aunt Frances' room, and I juggled those bonds into it, and left the bogus packet on the table in the right place. That was parlor magic, and no trouble at all for me, if you leave my soul out of it. Well, I closed the bag and went to the door, and stood there in one of those carelessly graceful poses for which I am justly famous." He paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. "I changed the bags while I was in that doorway," he continued, with an effort. "I put the one with the bonds onto the shelf and took the other off. But the people couldn't see me do it, because it was all at one side, beyond the frame of the door. To them I seemed merely to be standing there, with my grip in my hand. And, by and by, I said: 'I might as well leave this here, and take it out with yours.' Aunt Frances had a satchel on the floor. 'All right,' said she. So I set down my bag inside that room, and it's a fact that I nearly fell on my head beside it. I felt so mean that the strength was all gone out of me. Yet I went through the remainder of the performance, looking for my cigarette case, and turning out every pocket, so that they couldn't help noticing; and then I went away, and either of them would have been obliged to swear as an eyewitness that I had not taken those bonds out of that room.

"There's the worst part of it; that I should have been at so much pains not to get caught. If I'd merely walked in and stolen the bonds, I might have kept a little of my self-respect, for at that time the distorted memory of my talk with Aunt Frances still possessed my mind, so that it seemed to me as if I had some right upon my side. And, besides, I'd just had a letter from poor Sam Carlton, in the sanitarium, asking me to loan him some exalted figure of money, four hundred thousand, if I remember rightly; and to get him out before the market opened to-morrow. Crazy as a loon."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sylvia lift a finger, and Jack ceased to

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speak of the unfortunate Carlton. I was a little cold along my spine. Had these two friends foreseen that fate for me?

"I closed the door," Jack went on, "and took the bag with the bonds from the shelf and carried it to the den, where I put it into the big box, and wrapped the paper round."

"And you didn't see Miss Vannard's name on the paper?" said Sylvia.

"No."

"I should have thought you would have looked the package over rather carefully," said she, in a strange voice, as if she were breathless.

"I did; I viewed it from every angle; yet the writing wasn't large; and the den was rather dark. However, I looked at it again when I set it on the library table, with some other packages——"

"Not yours," said Sylvia.

"No; I guess they belonged to Aunt Frances."

"And you left it there?" said she. "Your box with the suit case inside?"

"Yes; I went upstairs again."

Sylvia turned to me with something like a frightened look.

"Arthur," she said, "Jack is very clever, but do you believe that he could have done this in Mrs. Seabury's presence, and not have been detected by those eyes—those dreadful, half-closed eyes? And, think of this; she has not seemed to care about the bonds. Is that like her? Arthur, I tell you she has had them all the time. She saw what Jack did; she guessed the trick."

"You don't mean that she opened the box after Jack left it in the library?"

"I do," she answered. "I believe that——"

"But, Sylvia," I interposed, "that can't be so, because Jack opened the box himself, after we got to Cape May."

"Not I," said Jack.

"I saw it open, in your room," said I, "immediately after Alice's death."

"That was another box," said he. "I had it in a trunk, and I took it out in

a hurry, to supply the place of the package you had seen. That package was outside my window; I had set it there for Dalton. You see, I was rather anxious to be rid of it, after so much attention had been drawn to it, and so I made a deal with Dalton at the station that he should come to my room quietly, by way of the veranda, and get the thing, and ship it to an address which I gave him on a card."

"Was that what you asked me to conceal, when Quinn knocked at the door?"

"Yes; there was going to be a search. The bonds might be found. But when you went out to the veranda, Dalton had already taken the package away. I suppose he got scared, and turned the errand over to a boy who lost the card, and gave the box in at the express office with only the address that happened to be written there, Miss Vannard's name and Steward's Hotel."

"And you hadn't opened it at all," said Sylvia; "but Mrs. Seabury had. It is perfectly clear. That's why Jack didn't see the name; he had put the paper on, with the name inward, but Mrs. Seabury turned it, so that the name was on the outside, and visible. Jack looked the package over very carefully, and saw no writing. Ten minutes later, Alice and I saw it at a glance. Isn't the explanation obvious?"

"And you believe Aunt Frances took the bonds," said Jack. "Upon my word, it's probable!"

"What do we care about the bonds?" said Sylvia steadily. "She took something else. She took the revolver!"

"No, no, no," Jack protested. "Don't say that. We mustn't turn against Aunt Frances. You have your own quarrel, Sylvia, and even there I think you're wrong. But here, I *know* you are. It's sheer madness to connect Aunt Frances with the death of Alice."

Sylvia walked toward the window and back again, struggling for self-control.

"I hope that I am wrong," she said, at last. "I hope that she is innocent of this. There have been times when

I have given her an affection strange as her own. That is over, yet I can't quite forget it. There is something in that woman's heart like a little child, stolen from its home and starved by brigands. I have stood and looked at her, and seen wild, evil faces, and beyond them the little dead child, and I have pitied and loved it."

She suddenly put her face against my shoulder and began to sob.

"You're overstrained, dearest," said I. "We mustn't talk of these things any more. Jack, you'll take her to Cape May, and make her rest."

A clock on the telephone desk struck the hour sharply.

"I have but a few minutes," said I. "Jack, what shall I say to Mrs. Seabury? Shall I tell her——"

"Yes," said he. "What she'll do I don't know. I'm more afraid of Hadley. He's a clever man—for a detective. He'll get on to this, about the bonds, and I shall hear of it. Sylvia, my good sister, here's a puzzle of conscience you can solve for me. Is it right that a man who has done such a thing as this should be in love?"

"If he's in love, he can't help it," said she, through tears. "There's neither right nor wrong about it. And if the lady loves him any the less, why she never could have loved him at all. Is it Miss Vannard, Jack? I hope so."

"Have you seen her?" I asked.

"Yes; she came to the hotel this morning, with some flowers, just a few white roses, for Alice. It was an odd thing to do, yet she did it very sweetly."

I blessed Heaven for this chance which had taken Sylvia's mind for a moment away from the terrible suspicion which she had expressed, and I made haste to pursue the subject.

"Speaking of Miss Vannard's oddities," said I, "it's a part of her artistic nature, I suppose. But did any other human being ever do such a thing as she did last evening, when she let Quinn think that it was she who was on the veranda in the storm? If that wasn't done for your sake, Jack, I'd like to know why."

"I don't want to be a fool about it," said he, "but I think it was. I believe some spell was cast upon us both when we first saw each other. I have never been the same man for an instant since. Do you remember," he continued, "the fat man she was sketching? Perhaps you'd like to see that sketch."

He took a bit of drawing paper from his pocket, a leaf from a sketch pad, and put it into my hands; and I beheld, not the fat man who had been dozing on the Donaldson's veranda, but Jack himself. It was a good piece of work, showing the gift; an attempt at true portrayal, to disclose by suggestion the thing that is, not by mere copying the thing that seems.

"Here is comprehension," said I. "This is the real Jack. I remember how she looked at you, but I didn't know you were her subject."

"It's what *she* doesn't know that harrows me," said he. "And how can I tell her, and be just to my deplorable self and to Aunt Frances, too? And if the thing comes out before I've told her——" He shuddered so that his heels rattled on the floor.

"It won't make the slightest difference," said Sylvia. "She will believe you."

"Well," said he, "time flies, and twirls us like whirligigs. I was a thief day before yesterday; I may be a saint to-morrow. I'm going to try. And, meanwhile, Arthur must be going. Wait here; I'll bring the carriage to the door."

"And Alice is in her grave," said Sylvia softly, when Jack had gone. "He never loved her; his heart is clean of any wrong to her or of the least disloyalty. He thinks of her in the same way as he always did. If she were alive, he would not be in the least changed toward her. From his side there would be no need. But what of Alice? You are very apt to see cruelty in nature and the ways of chance, but is there not a kind of rough mercy in her death? She would have suffered. If it were I, I would rather sleep."

CHAPTER XX.

I have reason to remember the architecture of the Seabury Trust building. It is agreeably simple. The Broad Street front has even a kind of majesty, and is nowhere marred by useless ornamentation, except upon the twelfth story, where some pillars stand between the windows, and pretend to bear the roof. Better instructed persons may see merit in this feature; but, oddly enough, it always jarred on me, even when I had no cause to view it with a positive animosity. I acquit the architect of any personal ill-will, however; he may have been quite ignorant of my existence, and surely he had no design to end it, when he drew those pillars on his plan. He merely sat with Chance before his drawing board; two blind men, working out they knew not what.

I mention the pillars, but they are unimportant in comparison with a certain neat detail of the interior. The architect and his unamiable comrade, above mentioned, scored their chief triumph with a plain iron stairway, which they set in a corridor on the twelfth floor, alongside the four elevators whose shafts are against the wall of the building. The ostensible purpose is to give access to the rude *châlet* on the roof, where the superintendent lives, and passes Alpine nights under the moon, with peaks of taller structures darkly notching the sky. The side of the stairway is on a line with the gates of the elevators, and thus there is a considerable recess between it and the wall. In a corner of that recess a single light is fixed, and the angle is precisely right to throw the image of the stairs upon a window looking out into the narrow and deep chasm between the trust's house and its loftier neighbor. The steps are partly sheathed on the outward side, and smoothly painted in a gray tone, but the back remains in its original simplicity; and for this reason the reflection in the window is entirely different from the visible reality. I suppose I must have seen that ghostly black

skeleton outside the glass a score of times before I knew that it was not a fire escape, but an intangible phantom.

The four elevators are not in use after seven of an evening, and belated tenants are served by a car beyond the trust offices, which are in the middle of the building, under a glazed dome. As I approached the car, I saw Charles Wickham, talking with the superintendent, who sat on a stool at the head of the stairs that led down to the basement. At sight of me, Wickham broke off his conversation, and came hastily forward, evidently desiring to intercept me as far as possible from the superintendent and the man in charge of the elevator.

"I suppose you're going up," said he. "I was wondering whether I'd venture. I've got something to say to Mrs. Seabury."

"I will tell her so," said I, "but she probably won't see you unless she knows what it's about."

He seemed to have some difficulty in framing a message which would be intelligible to Mrs. Seabury, but not to me.

"You might mention Mr. Lynde's name," said he uneasily. "Just say—er—Mr. Lynde, and some old matters that—er—I think she'll understand."

Certain old matters had been very much upon my mind in the last day or two. I made a wild guess that these might be the same.

"How old?" I asked. "Ten or twelve years, perhaps?"

He started.

"Why—why—what do you mean?"

"Shall I mention Mr. Leland's name, as well as Mr. Lynde's?"

He looked at me in blank amazement, and then slowly pulled his face into its ordinary lines.

"Mr. Leland?" said he doubtfully. "Any relative of Miss Sylvia Leland's?"

I saw that the man was now upon his guard, and I turned away without a word, and entered the car.

At the twelfth floor, I alighted in a transverse corridor, from which the other, where the iron stairway stands, branched at right angles, toward the front of the building. It led straight

to Mrs. Seabury's door, above which I saw, as I turned the corner, an oblong patch of light. If darkness had been there, I should have gone away and not returned; but if a thinner strip of light had been revealed, I should have come back by and by. On that twelfth floor there were many signs and wonders.

The office was on a corner of the building, its window looking out on Broad Street. The door was lettered with Mrs. Seabury's name, and her next neighbor, by a similar token, seemed to be one J. B. Brown, in the real-estate business. I happened to be aware, however, that there was no such person; he was a myth, and the room was held by Mrs. Seabury. Yet J. B. Brown figured on the books of account, and had been there for many years, an exemplary tenant, whose rent was never in arrears, for Mrs. Seabury paid the money to herself.

I knocked upon her door, and it was opened an inch, or thereabouts. A battering-ram would have been required to open it any farther from the outside, because there was a clever mechanism which restrained it; and many similar devices of precaution existed in that region, though Mrs. Seabury seemed to disdain them elsewhere. And I have fancied that this was a strange manifestation of her terror of a height; and that the enemy against whom she reared these odd defenses dwelt up there, two hundred feet above the pavement, a mere imp of the altitude, never coming down to earth.

"Good evening, aunty," said I. "Have you seen Mr. Norris?"

"Yes; I've seen Mr. Norris," she replied, with emphasis, "and I guess I've seen the last of him. I have dispensed with Mr. Norris."

Here were strange tidings, for, although my aunt's employees, from the highest to the lowest, had no more security of tenure than a leaf caught on the sail of a windmill, Norris had seemed to be the safest of them all, and had held his place for years.

"You didn't like what he had done in the matter of Wickham," said I,

thinking of my own share in it unpleasantly, though not with apprehension. I dared not hope to lose my high stool in the trust company on account of it.

"I should say I didn't," answered Mrs. Seabury. "I am attending to all those details myself, and Norris knew it, if he knew anything."

"You don't believe that Wickham took the bonds," I said.

"Never mind the bonds," she answered. "I'll see about that part of it."

Should I tell her, without being asked, that Jack had taken them? The point was too fine for my discretion, and I preserved a silence which was at once perceived.

"Do you know anything about it?" asked my aunt.

"Yes," said I.

"Do you think it was some of Jack's nonsense?"

"I hadn't thought of it in just that way," said I, offended. "Jack took them under a great pressure of anxiety, and with a real excuse. But it wasn't right, of course, and he knows it; no one better. I can preach harder than Jack can, but when it comes to being honest, he is the man."

"I told him he could have the bonds," said she absently, "and then I changed my mind." And she went on to speak in that strange way of hers, in half-uttered sentences, of Jack's capacity for business. "He is waking up; he is coming to himself. That young man will be a moneymaker, with the proper guidance—which he'll get. Yes; Jack has a great future." And she scolded me, inattentively, for speculating, and the scolding died away, like the voice of one speaking in a dream. Then she slowly waked, and assumed a different aspect.

"But where are the bonds now?" I asked. "You have them, haven't you?"



She opened the bookcase, and the books vanished.

"I? No," said she. "Where did Jack put them?"

I told her.

"Well, I had my suspicions about that package, of course," said she, "though I didn't know that Jack had anything to do with it. I thought it was Dalton's work. But I'm doing all I can to trace it. The bonds will be recovered, and even if they're not, I shall find means to make the loss fall on the man through whom they're negotiated. I'm not worrying."

Evidently, Aunt Frances did not think herself bound to tell me the truth, but though I perceived this fact I was not much the wiser for my penetration.

"My chief interest just now," said Mrs. Seabury, "is to win back Sylvia's affection. That is why you're here to-

night. There are influences at work to separate Sylvia and me which you don't dream of. Clinton is not the only troublemaker and blackmailer. There'll be another one here upon that business, before the evening's over, and I want you to help me get the better of him. Will you do it?"

I was surprised on all accounts that she should ask the question, being more accustomed to brisk orders.

"Certainly," said I. "Who is he? Not Wickham?"

Her eyes narrowed and the yellow light gleamed in them for a moment.

"Wickham," she said. "Nonsense! What put Wickham into your head?"

"He's below; he wants to see you," I replied, and gave her the man's stumbling message, with no mention of my own questions, however. She seemed to be annoyed.

"Well," she said, "it's not Wickham; we've bigger fish than that to fry. It's Lynde."

Strangely enough, I was affected by pity, as if I had supposed the fellow to be honest and had heard suddenly that he had fallen into wrong.

"Poor devil," said I, under my breath; and she heard me, and was agrieved.

"Well, I'd like to know why you say that," she demanded. "If there's a creature on earth that is more to be despised than a blackmailer, I never heard about it."

"I think there's no great natural evil in this fellow Lynde," said I. "He is a product of the era, and of the fate that mated him to a woman who craves luxury."

"Well, she won't get any luxury out of me," responded Mrs. Seabury. "Luxury?" With great scorn. "No; I think not. Poverty is what she'll get. I'll drive her husband out of his employment. I'll beggar him. Do you suppose she knows what he is up to? Has she any active part in it?"

"Probably not," said I gloomily, for the matter weighed upon my soul.

"We'll see," she said. "Now, this is what I want you to do. Come here."

She went to a tall bookcase that

stood against the wall in a corner. There were thin curtains inside the glass, and the brown backs of volumes could be seen in many places. She opened the bookcase, and the books vanished; only the backs were there, upheld by narrow strips of wood, fastened upon the doors and simulating the ends of shelves. I saw a tall stool, very narrow, and a contrivance on the wall, so fixed that he who sat upon the stool might write, as at a little desk, upon some sheets of paper, fastened by a clip.

"A witness is occasionally a convenience," said Aunt Frances. "I have thus far avoided his appearance in any published proceedings, and I shall doubtless continue to do so. This matter of ours will be entirely private."

"You wish me to sit in there?" I asked. "It is an awful thing to do."

"You will be acting in Sylvia's interest, not to mention mine," she said, "and I hope you have no sympathy with a blackmailer."

"I have none with blackmailing," said I, "but when it comes to that poor, fat, little rascal, who might almost have been a gentleman, with better luck——"

"This is absolutely necessary for my protection," she interposed. "You don't know this man as I do. He is a dangerous creature. He may do more harm than you imagine. I have chosen you to help me, Arthur, because I can rely on you, and partly because this is so much Sylvia's affair. You would like to know the truth about our quarrel, wouldn't you?"

"If Sylvia wished me to," said I.

"Well, she does," rejoined Aunt Frances. "She may not know it at the moment, but she'll be very glad, afterward. Arthur, this will unite us as we were before. I shall have Sylvia's affection as I had it once, and we shall all be happy again."

"You offer me a price I can't refuse," said I.

"That's good," said she. "That's the way to look at it. There's too much in this, Arthur, for us all. We can't afford to hesitate at any means. Let me show you," she went on hastily,

and slipped into that strange cupboard. "Here's a door at the end. Just turn that handle, and it opens. See; that's the way into the office of my good friend Brown, a very admirable neighbor." She turned to smile at me. "Confidentially, my dear, there isn't any Brown; so don't hesitate to intrude upon him when I give you the signal."

She closed the panel door, and came out of that extraordinary hiding place.

"Look inside," she said, approaching her desk.

I did so, and immediately saw a faint red light that came from a little lamp in the top of the bookcase.

"When you see that," said she, "you may call on Mr. Brown. We will have a look at his quarters."

There was an ordinary door between the rooms, but a letter press stood in front of it. I rolled it away, at a sign from Mrs. Seabury, and we entered a room scantily furnished with a few chairs and a desk.

"Here is the panel which you saw me open," said Aunt Frances. "When you have closed it behind you, press this button, and I shall know that you are out. It may not be necessary for you to stay inside that place through the whole interview."

We returned to the other office, and she sat down at the table in the middle of the room, motioning me to a seat opposite her. From one of several drawers in the table, she took some sheets of paper covered with what proved to be a list of certain properties, with a value assigned to each.

"I am engaged in rather an important operation, Arthur," she said, running over the sheets and making crosses with a red pencil. "These are iron and coal properties in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and the Steel Trust is going to buy them. The Steel Trust feels itself to be very much in need of them just now. I have managed this affair entirely to my liking, Arthur. It has taken a long time, and a lot of money, but the deal is ready to be closed at a very satisfactory figure."

She handed me the papers across the table, and I ran my eye over them, surprised by the great values represented.

"Those that are marked with the red cross," said she, "are properties in which Sylvia's father was interested. He lost them all as the result of litigation, through the exercise of very poor judgment on his part; and, slowly, through the years, I have gathered them all in. Everything that Mr. Leland had a dollar's interest in I have acquired. Of course, they weren't worth nearly so much in Mr. Leland's time, but that doesn't matter. Those are the prices that the steel company will pay, and when the deal is finished, I shall pass that money to Sylvia's account outright. Run over the figures, Arthur; they total upward of three millions."

This was true. The deal, entire, called for about twenty-seven millions, of which Sylvia would have three, Mrs. Seabury—as she informed me—seventeen, and her associates the remaining seven.

"She will have retrieved her father's fortune," said Aunt Frances, "and with a handsome profit, too. It will be a marriage portion, and I think Sylvia will be pleased to have her father's money for that purpose. I have been, as it were, the steward of his possessions, and not unfaithful. It was very hard to regain some of this property, Arthur; a very difficult and very costly fight I've had to get it. But I knew what it would mean to Sylvia, and I never rested till I had it all, for her sake."

What a distressful thing is the loss of confidence! If I could have trusted Mrs. Seabury in that moment I could have felt the deepest gratitude and a sincere affection. All her mistakes, the secrecy of her procedure, the involving of these properties in a vast scheme of her own, without a word to Sylvia—all these matters would have weighed as lightly as a feather, if only I could have reposed full faith in her intent, now and before; if I could have believed that she had really worked for

Sylvia in this way, and that she was dealing frankly with me in this disclosure. But she had so undermined the foundations of my trust in her sincerity that I now sat, miserable, the prey of numberless suspicions, every one of which was mated with its own particular kind of self-reproach. I blamed myself vainly, and tried again to trust her, and was again beset by doubts which seemed unjust and mean.

"Aunt Frances," said I, in desperation, "if you can show this to Sylvia in the right way—not with proofs; I don't mean that; but with the subtler evidences——"

I stopped, inadequate to my theme.

"Evidences?" she echoed. "What evidences can be required? Good heavens! The whole thing will be as plain as bookkeeping can make it, and Sylvia will get the money. What more can she ask? Her father's properties are a matter of court record, and here they all are. Isn't that sufficient?"

"Yes," said I, falteringly and untruthfully; "it would seem so. Does this cover Clinton's accusation?"

"It does," she answered promptly. "He charged me with coming into possession of these properties as a result of the litigation that ruined Mr. Leland. He said that I was in reality the party on the other side, in that fight; that I worked through dummies, and received the spoil." She took more papers out of the drawer. "Here," she continued, "are the complete records of the titles to these properties, from colonial times to the present day. They show just how and when I got the properties, and from whom, and what I paid; and these records are not of my own making; they were compiled and sworn to by the Guarantee Company. Do you think that Sylvia will be satisfied?"

Mrs. Seabury owned the Guarantee Company, but she was not aware that I knew it. I was accustomed to that sort of thing; it impressed me little.

"It's not a question of satisfaction, aunty," said I. "If Sylvia is satisfied she'll be a great deal more. You will have won her heart forever."

"Yes," she said; "yes. That's what I want. I'm trying to make her be the same to me as she was before that troublemaker, Clinton, came upon the scene."

Here was sincerity; here was Aunt Frances herself. She was going to "make" Sylvia love her. It was pathetic, and I felt an answering emotion. Hastily, I began to frame such simple phrases as would please her best, but I was interrupted.

"Our time is up," she said, glancing at the clock that ticked upon the table. "You'd better take your place now, so that we shan't have to hurry. It's not uncomfortable in there."

That narrow prison was, indeed, less trying to the physical part of me than I would have supposed. There was air enough, and the night was not warm. A shower had cooled the city, and the rain still fell. My wretchedness came not from the quality of the place, but from the nature of my business.

Lynde was prompt, and I thanked him in my heart, knowing that the worst part of my misery would be over when the strain of absolute inaction should be relieved, even by an occupation so detestable as listening. The man's voice came to me with startling clearness, and I cringed as if I had been seen.

"Good evening, Mrs. Seabury," said he, with even more than his accustomed gravity; and I heard him take his seat, at her request.

There was a silence just long enough to be remarked.

"I trust," said he, "that you have set aside sufficient time for this interview. Its nature will surprise you."

"I don't think so," responded Mrs. Seabury.

"When you received my message, did you form any idea of the subject which I desired to take up with you?"

"I did," said she.

"You judged that it related to the murder of Miss Warden, I presume?"

She did not instantly reply, and I inferred that she had been surprised.

"To the murder of Miss Warden," she repeated. "No; that isn't what

you're here to talk about. I know the nature of your business."

"Mrs. Seabury," said Lynde, after a pause, "I would beg to be allowed the time for a few general observations, by way of introduction. You have known me for some years, and have intrusted delicate affairs to my attention. In none of those matters have I ever failed to serve you with an exact fidelity."

"You knew your business, and you always earned your money," she responded. "This is the first time that I have ever caught you in any crookedness."

"Crookedness," he repeated. "That is a harsh word, Mrs. Seabury."

"Yes; so it is," said she. "Let me explain it. I learned recently, *very* recently, that you had been prying into matters which concerned me, and did *not* concern you. I would have told you so this forenoon, but you had taken a hurried departure from Cape May. When you asked for this interview, I let you understand that I was done with Mr. Stanton Lynde permanently. You knew why. You have been prying into the subject of the Leland properties, and I understand your motive. Now, let's hear what you have to say to me."

"My conduct may be exceptional," said he, "but I believe it to be justified, in so far as any human conduct can be. In this world we are affected by contending obligations. We are all morally insolvent, seeking vainly for some honorable composition with our creditors, the abstract virtues. In the end we must pay one and put off another. The human law recognizes a preference of this kind, and the moral law does the same."

"And which of the abstract virtues is preferred in your schedule of liabilities?" she asked, with a sneer. But he replied, in deadly seriousness:

"I have chosen loyalty."

"Well, I like that!" said she. "Loyal, are you? Not to me, certainly."

"There are different kinds. I have preferred loyalty in love to all the others. In plain words, I have decided

that the supreme right is for a man to protect his mate. Whether in the forests of the primitive world, with crude nature and wild beasts as his enemies, or in this modern age of splendor, the obligation is the same. A man and his mate have more foes now, but fewer weapons; there is only one, indeed. I refer, of course, to money."

"In even plainer words," responded Mrs. Seabury, "you are going to blackmail me, if you can; and by way of preface, you are now laying the blame upon your wife. Is that it?"

It was mere waste to lavish insults on this man, for he was far beyond their reach, immersed in this adventure as a diver in water. His ears were full of it; he heard no voices from above.

"As my wife knows nothing whatever about the matter," he replied calmly, "she can bear no blame. She could bear none, in any case. The business affairs of my family are in my hands. Mrs. Lynde is my inspiration, often my very helpful adviser, but those operations by which we strive to better our pecuniary situation are conducted by me, and I alone am responsible for their legitimacy. As for her desires, I need not remind you that it is no longer possible, *it is no longer possible*, I say—for a young, beautiful, and intelligent woman to contemplate poverty with acquiescence. The end of that has fully come, in this country. In such an age as this the true title to wealth lies with those who have the natural endowment to enjoy it splendidly and decorate the world. I am not bound in honor and conscience merely to support my wife, but to provide her with those luxuries which are the proper setting for her personality."

Fancy this harangue, pronounced in a grave, measured, and superior tone appropriate to the bench, without excitement, the emphasis of special points laid on apparently for precise instruction only, that the hearer might have no excuse for error.

"I see," said Mrs. Seabury. "Yes, indeed. The luxury that women want is very expensive. Every parlor maid

reads the illustrated Sunday newspapers and dreams of steam yachts. You are preparing me for the mention of a high figure."

"Exactly," answered Lynde. "As for myself, I am a man of very few desires, humbled from boyhood by my poor appearance, and now prematurely overtaken by infirmities. To be plain with you, I take very little pleasure in anything. I have, however, a powerful sense of duty, and I have shown you the direction in which it urges me."

"Well," said she. "Go on."

"Mrs. Seabury, I have secured, in various ways, a certain business advantage over you. Its value remains to be determined between us."

"The question whether it has any value at all remains to be determined, or you think it does," said she. "What is it?"

"In the first place," said he, speaking, as I thought, with difficulty, and as if he were overcoming some strong repugnance for the subject; "in the first place, I have solved the mystery of Miss Warden's death. We share that knowledge, and there seems to be a reasonable probability that the secret may be held between us indefinitely."

The succeeding silence may have lasted ten seconds, but it seemed very long. I had ample time to realize Mrs. Seabury's extraordinary position. Obviously, she had not expected that Lynde would take up this theme, and I believed that she had no means of knowing what he had to say upon it. For some reason connected with her attempt to win Sylvia, she desired me to hear Lynde's accusation in the matter of the Leland properties, but was she willing I should hear Lynde's theory of the murder? He seemed to me more likely than any one else to have found out the truth which Mrs. Seabury had twice refused to tell me. If she did not wish me to hear it, she could give the signal; but, having sent me away, she could not call me back again. No provision had been made for such an exigency; she had not even shown me how to open the panel from

the other side, if any way existed, and of course the button which she had directed me to press would operate only after the panel had been closed, for otherwise she could never know that a witness whom she had dismissed would not immediately return. She had now to choose between permitting me to hear all, and cutting me off from any further use to her. It is possible that her hatred of Lynde as a blackmailer may have led her to belittle him, and have thus influenced her decision. She could not have believed he knew that secret which he claimed to share with her.

"If you have any information about Miss Warden's death," she said, "I will pay you nothing for it. I don't require it. You may go on, however, if you care to waste your time."

"As to that," he said, "I shall even venture to take a moment more for purely personal expressions. I have the natural feeling in regard to this crime. I cannot think of it without the most distressing emotions; the memory of my present complicity will haunt me as long as I live. Knowing whose act it was, I am disturbed by the necessity for silence. Impulses out of my boyhood urge me toward such action as would then have seemed to me to be my duty. My occupation and associates have estranged me from the public, and have tended constantly toward contempt for law, yet for the moment the old ideas of justice are revived in me, and I am conscious of regret because my interests will not permit me to denounce you openly for the murder of Alice Warden."

His voice rose but very little in this singular address. The references to his former self seemed to kindle a faint flame of excitement, which subsided almost instantly, and the last words were uttered in his usual tone of studied and habitual precision. Mrs. Seabury did not immediately respond; she had been taken by surprise. In imagination I could see her, sitting perfectly still, her eyes almost closed, and the yellow gleam brightening between the lids.

"Your interests," she said, at length.

"Yes; I'll see about your interests. In my opinion, you won't have any, when I am through with you."

"I will abide the event," responded Lynde. "Let us proceed to business."

I heard the light sound of folded papers crackling in the hand as they were flattened for the convenience of the eye in reading.

"What's that?" demanded Mrs. Seabury. "What have you there?"

"I have prepared a written report upon these matters," answered Lynde. "It covers the facts about Miss Warden's death, and also those concerning the Leland properties."

"Let me see it," said she. "Give it to me."

"I would prefer to read," said he quietly.

"No other copy? You surprise me."

"I have none here," said Lynde. "One exists, however."

"I've no doubt of it," said she. "All men are mortal, but in such affairs as this they generally contrive to make the evil that they do live after them. Because it's worth money, as they imagine."

I perceived by her tone that she was undecided as to her course of action, probably on my account, and I wondered whether she would dare to send me away after I had heard Lynde's accusation. It seemed impossible that she should thus show fear of him.

"In the matter of Alice Warden," Lynde began to read, not without a relish for his own careful composition, "I find, upon investigation, that she came to her death at your hands, Frances Seabury; and that the act sprang from a certain motive and was executed in a certain manner, herein-after stated.

"The motive was to prevent further disclosures by Miss Warden to Miss Leland, threatening the disruption of your household and great pecuniary loss through the breaking off of the deal now pending with the United States Steel Company.

"The manner of this crime has been wholly misunderstood, except by me. Upon the first view, I perceived——"

"You needn't read any more of that," Mrs. Seabury interposed, steadily enough, but in a strained and high voice. "You can't intimidate me. I care nothing for your accusations. This case is in such a state that anybody may be slandered for the moment. Other little snipes beside yourself have piped against me, without gaining much attention. If you have any facts, let me see them, and I'll draw my own conclusions."

Lynde made no response, and there was a silence which I did not understand, until it had endured for perhaps a minute, and then I knew that Mrs. Seabury had taken the document out of her accuser's hand, and was reading it. The time ran on, and my heart beat harder and harder, till the cabinet in which I was inclosed seemed to be throbbing to this pounding, like a dull drum.

"You seem impressed," said Lynde, with satisfaction.

"I'm impressed with the fact that you're an idiot," she exclaimed angrily. "Is this all you have about Miss Warden?"

"I am prepared to supply certain details," said he, "in support of my main contention that the case is one of counterfeited suicide, planned by you, and——"

"Counterfeited suicide!" retorted Mrs. Seabury, with exaggerated contempt. "That's all I care to hear from you on that subject. What is the rest of this writing?"

"My second proposition," answered Lynde, "relates to your acquisition of the Leland properties. On that point you are too well prepared. I shall not be able to support my contentions. You deprived Mr. Leland of his rights through treachery, but no one can prove it now."

"You admit that?" said Mrs. Seabury, after a pause. "You admit that you have failed to make out a case against me?"

"I shall make no fight there," said Lynde. "I include the matter in my report, for the sake of completeness."

It is now overshadowed by another matter. I called on Mr. Wickham late this afternoon."

"Well?" said she sharply.

"Mr. Wickham has a singular taste in lodgings," responded Lynde. "He rents a room in your small office building on Ninth Street, and makes shift to live there."

"Well?" said she again.

"I can't imagine any special advantage," said he, "except that the building is strictly fireproof. If a man had some very valuable document which he desired to keep constantly within reach, such a lodging might seem eligible. It cannot burn."

"How does this interest me?" she asked. "I have no time for these trifles."

At that moment the blackness of my cabinet was tinged with red, as from a dull fire.

"This trifle in regard to Wickham is connected with another small matter," said Lynde, "just a phrase in a conversation which I happened to overhear between Miss Leland and Mr. Arthur Seabury. The point was Doctor Clinton's refusal to disclose certain facts, and Miss Leland used the words, 'under the seal of his profession,' and Mr. Seabury asked whom Doctor Clinton had attended that could know——"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Seabury.

"I was thus led to the discovery noted in my third proposition," said he, "concerning Judge Graves. Mrs. Seabury, I have your note to Graves, the one that Warren Leland found, the

one that Wickham stole when he let Leland die without——"

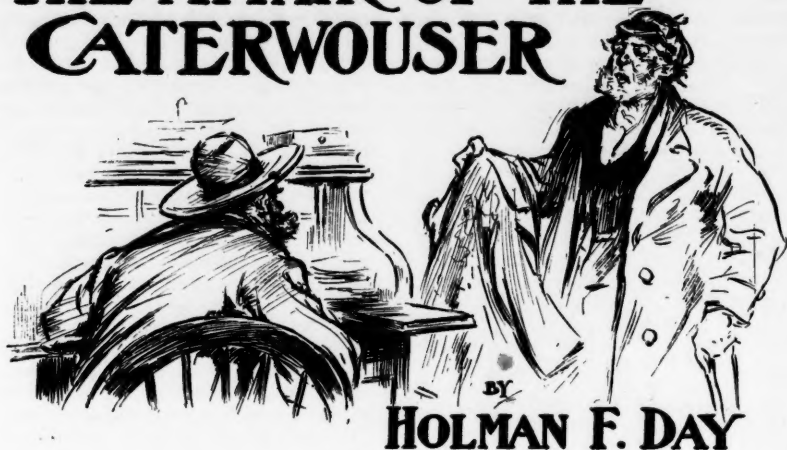
His voice was checked with a peculiar suddenness, as if the breath had been cut off in his throat. I had heard, while he was uttering the last few words, a rending sound as of the splintering of light wood. It was not the sound of a blow; I could not put a meaning on it; yet when Lynde ceased to speak in that strange way my heart stood still. Faint noises followed, but my excitement had risen to such a pitch as to affect both hearing and judgment. I had no comprehension of what was taking place in that room, no picture of it. A deadly hush had fallen there; my strained attention seemed to detect far-away sounds from every corner of the city, but that room stood alone in the midst of it, the single silent place. It was impossible to conceive of those two people sitting face to face without speech for so long a time and after such a scene. Some act of violence must have been done whereby the voice of one of them had been stilled.

I had no doubt that there existed some means of seeing out from the cabinet, but I had not discovered it. No light showed at any crevice. The red glow had now faded from the velvet curtain of the darkness. The whole effect was like a dream of being blind, deaf, and shackled in a moment of extreme emergency. There was the same struggle of the members and the senses to be free; and I burst out of that place as from the oppression of tortured sleep.

TO BE CONTINUED.



THE AFFAIR OF THE CATERWOUSER



HOLMAN F. DAY

ILLUSTRATED BY CH. GRUNWALD

PUTTING a refractory prisoner into the doghole of a county jail—putting him in personally with one's two stout arms and with the aid of the toe of a compelling boot is an operation considerably apart from lecturing on moral suasion before a church conference. And, therefore, Cap'n Sproul's mood when he stamped back into his office was not as purely contemplative and mild as that of a doctor of divinity. His necktie was twisted around under his ear like a hangman's knot, his toe ached, and four red scratches gridironed his cheek. A stranger was in the office with Hiram Look. The stranger was plainly waiting to discuss business with the high sheriff of Cuxabexis. But the high sheriff paid no attention to either. He sat down at his desk and began to hunt for court-plaster.

The stranger slipped off his chair and went to the desk. He was an elderly man with a "figger-four" leg—a withered limb with the knee chronically bent at a right angle. At the desk he shot up and poised himself on his sound leg. Cap'n Sproul, his nerves as much

awry as his temper, ducked instinctively. The man flicked the newspaper wrapping off something he carried under his arm and laid the article on the desk. It was a coat, spattered from collar to skirts with some substance.

"That's aig, mostly," the stranger explained; "aig, mostly, and then considerable general gurry. It's only a sample of what's been done. Only a sample, but what do you think of *that*?" There was grief as well as repressed indignation in his tones.

Cap'n Sproul, his exploring hands still in a drawer, looked at the coat, looked at the man, stared back again at the coat, and then glared so ferociously at the stranger that he dropped down upon his crooked leg in a sort of a panic.

"What do you take this place for—a tailor shop, bushelin' and cleansin' done promptly?" the sheriff demanded. "Haul that henhouse pennant down off'm my desk."

"I ain't made any mistake," insisted the stranger, recovering himself after a moment. He shot up on his sound leg. "I'm after law and justice and

protection, and I've come to the man that this county has elected to protect us. That coat, there, is an exhibit, just to show you a part of what's been done to me."

"Other exhibits a rail and some tar and feathers?" inquired the cap'n. "When eggs is fetchin' thirty-two cents a dozen neighbors don't usually throw 'em unless there's good reason for it. I'm advisin' you to go home and lead a better life." He began to search again for the court-plaster.

"You ought to listen to the man," Hiram advised the sheriff. "He's come on straight business. Go ahead and state it," he bade the visitor. "My friend, the sheriff, is a little wrought up over other matters just now, but you'll find him all right."

"You needn't pass out any apologies for any state of mind I'm ever in," exploded the cap'n. "If a mob has tackled this man he probably deserved what he got. I never knowed it otherwise."

He looked sourly at the petitioner. The man's face irritated him. The countenance was snouted, with a suggestion of pork about it.

"Mobs ain't genteel or lawful, but they usually know what they are doin'," observed the sheriff, finishing his survey.

The stranger dropped to his short leg. "I want you to understand—" he began.

Cap'n Sproul, his general state of mind excusing his touchiness, interrupted.

"If you're goin' to talk with me you pick one level and you stay there. Up or down, I don't care which—but this peekaboo business makes me nervous." The man rose on his hale leg. "Now what's your name and what about it?"

"It's Root—Copheta Root, of South Palmyry, and I don't relish any slurs about mobs and ridin' on a rail. There's no mob and no rail and no tar and feathers. But it's hell with the cover propped open out to my place, and I want protection."

"Protection from what?"

"That's the trouble. I don't know

what from," confessed Mr. Root. In his despair he forgot orders, and descended weakly upon his bent leg. He recovered himself and shot up again when the cap'n glowered at him.

"You take a chair, Root!" advised the sheriff. "That elevator performance of yours seems to be affectin' your brains. Now, you say you want protection, hey; and you don't know what you want to be protected from? You set down and be quiet and let your brains stop swashin', and then you tell me what the matter is with you!"

Root retreated to the chair that he had left. He carried the mussed coat with him and spread it across his knees.

"This is only a sample. It's bust and bang, break and bombard, nigh every hour of the day or night! Chiny ware and tin ware flyin' around the house, panes of glass smashed out, aigs goin' squash against the walls, chairs dancin' and tables waltzin', and every now and then furniture of some sort comin' down the front stairs devil bent for 'lection!"

The sheriff inked his pen and drew a sheet of paper from a pigeonhole.

"Give name or names of disturbin' parties," he commanded, with official crispness, "and then sign complaint, and I——"

"Name or names!" bleated Mr. Root. "How in the name of the humpbacked heifer of Herod be I to know who they are that's doin' it?" He arose in his agitation.

The sheriff poised his pen, ready inked. "Keep your settin', Root," he counseled. "Your brains are still swashin'."

"My brains are as clear and level as yours be, and I don't relish further slurs on that point, and I here and now tell you so, even if you are high sheriff of this county! What I say here and now to you further is that things are bein' done to me and to my house—sample of which I exhibit." He shook the unspeakable coat at the sheriff. "And it ain't bein' done by human hands. There ain't nobody in the house but me and my wife and our daughter. And we're havin' everything all

smashed up, and we can't turn hand to stop it because we ain't ever seen any one doin' it. Name or names! Blast it, if I knew who it was they'd be full of buckshot before this. It's because I don't know name or names that I'm here after protection."

Cap'n Sproul stole a glance at Hiram over his spectacles—a glance that spoke volumes. Then he looked Mr. Root over with much interest. His air showed that he thought he understood what ailed that gentleman. When he spoke next, it was in that tone of coaxing blandness that one employs toward children or witlings. Mr. Root promptly noted that tone, and resented it, but put restraint on his rising passion.

"Now, Root," crooned the sheriff, "things bein' as they are at your house, ructionists not showin' themselves, for a guess who should you say was a-doin' it?"

"I ain't any expert on ha'nts. I just know I'm ha'nted. Some of them in our neighborhood that pretend to know, say it's witherlicks. Others say it's a caterwouser. I ain't sayin'. I don't know. But here's one exhibit." He shook the coat.

"Speaks for itself," said the sheriff soothingly. "Opinions differ always among them that knows ha'nts. I suppose it has run in your family," he pursued, signally failing to conceal his convictions, "I mean these things have bothered your family in past years. Was you ever in a—that is to say, did any of your folks ever have to be put in a——" In spite of his resolve to probe the matter of Mr. Root's sanity, the fires that now flamed in that outraged gentleman's beady eyes made him apprehensive. His tongue balked. He couldn't finish his question.

"I stump ye to go ahead and ask it!" vociferated Root, after waiting a little while. "I'll sue you for slander if you do. You needn't try to fool me with your cat-licking-cream manners. You're tryin' to put me down as a lunatic. You needn't deny. I see it. But you look me in the eye. When you see any signs of my bein' crazy, you out and say so, and we'll see about it!"

Cap'n Sproul, gazing, confessed to himself that he seemed to be looking upon a very genuine specimen of level-headed Yankee. The prompt notion that the man was trying to hoax him in some manner pricked his ready irritability once more.

"I'll tell you what you'd better do, Root," he advised sarcastically; "seein' that these things of yours, what they are, haven't got names to be put into a warrant nor any bodies to apply handcuffs or buckshot to, I'll set here and



"My wife sets on end most of the time, like a rabbit cornered in a sawmill."

give 'em a little absent-sheriff treatment. That seems to be the only way of handling a—what did you say he was?"

"You're head officer in this county and I've come to you as a taxpayer askin' protection," cried Mr. Root. "Do you dare to set there and tell me that you ain't goin' to act?"

"Question noted and filed. Let me ask you one. Do you think you are comin' into my office with a coat that would make a settin' hen shed tears and a story that would win first prize in an insane horsepittle lyceum meetin', and think you're goin' to see me strike

out for Palmyra with a pair of handcuffs and a witch bridle? I'm goin' to answer my question myself. Not by a damsite. Now, havin' that much help you can go ahead and answer your own conundrum."

"That final?" demanded Mr. Root.

"It's final with a dot as big as your fist."

"I think you ought to look into the thing, Aaron," Hiram ventured. "It seems to be pretty much of a mystery. And it ought to be cleared up, if this citizen is losin' property."

"Are you an expert on kittysousers—or whatever they are—or do you think I am?" demanded the sheriff.

"No-o-o, but a sheriff is——"

"A sheriff gets under way when a course is given him and names are on the chart. He don't go cruising into any such fog as that critter is puffin' into the air."

Mr. Root rose to the full length of his good leg, and stuffed the condemned coat under his arm. "I'll report this treatment of a taxpayer," he declared, with heat.

"Report in full with them names you gave me and it will make spicy readin' for the funny columns," stated the sheriff. "But the laugh won't be on me. That's all, and good day!"

He resumed his search for the court-plaster, and Mr. Root seesawed out. Hiram hesitated a moment, and then followed him. He overtook the indignant Palmyra man on the street. Hiram gave him a cigar and endeavored to keep step with him, but, after limping sociably for a few rods, held Root up against a handy building.

"Now, brother," he cautioned, "I'd think twice before I came out in any talk too strong against the sheriff. It's a devil of a cock-and-bull yarn you've got there, anyway. I never heard anything like it—and it was my business for thirty years runnin' a circus and sideshow and huntin' for freaks. And I never heard of a witherlick or a caterwouser. Here, have a light off my cigar! Now, see here, old man, are you straight on your story? I'm interested, I swear I am."

"Why ain't he as much of a man as you be, and let me tell it to him right end to?" whined Mr. Root. "What I ought to have done was swat him across the mouth with this coat, aigs and all, when he insulted me by talkin' about my bein' crazy!"

"You caught him when he was fussed up," apologized Hiram. "But you go ahead and tell *me*. I'm one of your kind when it comes to bein' interested in a mystery."

Mr. Root was plainly encouraged, and somewhat mollified. He "whoofed" vigorously at his cigar for a few moments.

"It started about two weeks ago," he related. "It was mostly creakin's and travelin's at first. Trodgin's to and fro, like, in the upper rooms. My place is the old tavern on Root Hill. Nobody in it now but me and wife and our girl. They went to work, you know, last year, and shifted the stage road over so it runs around the hill, blast their pelts, and there we are, left up on top of that hill, tavern and all, and all the trade goin' to the tavern that has been built new in the village. I tell ye, it's bad enough to have your business knocked galleywest without havin' a ha'nt settle on you and begin to bust up housekeepin'." Mr. Root got a little more solace from his cigar, spat far, and resumed.

"It's plenty lonesome, us three stayin' there in that tavern. But to have something a-trampin' and travelin' nights and slingin' dishes around day-times and plasterin' me with an aig almost every time I turn round, it gets to be wearin' on the nerves. My girl is nigh bedrid with it, and my wife sets on end most of the time, like a rabbit cornered in a sawmill. And that cussed old hake up in that sheriff's office not willin' to turn his hand over to help me find out what the matter is!"

"Well, you can't hardly expect a high sheriff to go out spook huntin'," remonstrated Hiram. "It ain't laid down in the by-laws."

"I don't care who it is that's perpetratin' malicious mischief," Mr.

Root insisted. "It's mischief, and it's damage; and the man to stop it is the high sheriff of this county. And I'm goin' to expose him!"

For some moments Hiram's eyes had been gleaming. The instinct of the showman had suddenly awakened.

"Now, between you and me, Root," he said earnestly, "right down to cases, dead level, honest Injun, have you been passin' this thing along straight? All this goin' on in your house?"

"I tell you there's Tophet to pay, there. I ain't stretchin' it a mite. Dishes flyin' and me ketchin' an aig, or whatever soft thing the caterwouser happens to find handy, right behind the ear whenever he happens to think of it. I'm to the end of my tether. If it ain't stopped, I'll be a plumb lunatic."

"You don't want it stopped."

"I what?"

"If it will only keep up," declared Hiram, the showman's fires in his eyes, "keep up regular and reliable, you don't need to worry about losin' the tavern business. Why, man, you've got an attraction there in your place that will beat anything on the vaudeville circuit! Haven't the neighbors been rushin' in already?"

"Traipsin' through till we're crazy," complained Mr. Root dolefully.

"And the whatever-it-is has kept right on doin' his little stunt, crowd or no crowd?"

"'Parently gets busier the more there is to see him," stated Root despondently.

"And you ain't ever thought about the show end of the thing?" Hiram demanded.

"Well, it ain't any kind of a pleasin' show to me to see my dishes and vittles and furniture sky-hootin' round." Mr. Root's tone was decisive. "I just want it stopped, that's all I want."

"Man, man," cried Hiram, grasping his coat lapels and shaking him, "wake up! Get out some handbills. Come along with me. I'll write 'em for you. Gad, I can see just the headline you need on 'em. Come along! 'The Ram-pageous Caterwouser. Come one, come

all, and behold a real ghost in operation.' Joecephas, man, but I'd like to stand outside and bark that show. But I can't hardly do that in these days when I'm director in a bank. However, come on! I'll see you through with the launchin' of it. Stand right there in the doorway and charge fifty cents admission—no children admitted and no resks assumed. House cleared every thirty minutes. New show on every half hour. Why, it will be a continuous! They'll come from miles around. Let's get down to that printin' office."

But Mr. Root hung back. He had lost his air of despondency. This wonderful, illuminating idea of the old showman's burst on him so suddenly that he had staggered. But he had been so far from thinking of it on his own initiative that the whole thing, tavern and its spectacle, seemed to belong to this masterful man who was trying to drag him away in quest of handbills.

"Just a minute, Mister Look," he stammered, trying to keep his voice calm. "If you start your show, what share be you goin' to let me have?"

"My show!" snapped Hiram. "I ain't got anything to do with it."

"Then what's your charges goin' to be for settin' me to goin'?"

"Not a cent. Come along to the printin' office!"

By the manner in which Mr. Root blinked it was plain that he was not accustomed to receiving favors for nothing. He set himself high on his long leg and resisted Hiram's attempts to pull him along.

"What's the matter with you, you infernal mule?" the old showman demanded.

"There's a ketch in it somewheres," faltered the other.

"You—you—pig-nosed hyena, are you framin' up that I'm bunko-steerin' you?"

Mr. Root quailed before this indignation, but he resisted, his hand protecting a protuberance that was plainly his wallet.

Hiram looked him up and down

scornfully and started away. "If there had been a pure-food law goin' when you were born you would have hollered for a guarantee on the milk they put in your nursin' bottle," he remarked.

"I'll take back what I said about the ketch," cried Mr. Root in a quavering voice. Hiram kept on. But after he had gone a little way he muttered some vigorous anathema, whirled on his heel, and came back. His natural curiosity overmastered his resentment.

"You tell me some of them doin's at your house all over again, and be sure you tell the truth," he commanded.

Mr. Root related, forcefully, convincingly, ending with almost tearful complaint about the damage that was being done to his household goods.

"I'm going to make you good and whole on this thing in spite of yourself," stated the volunteer at last. "You come along. But if you blat one more blat, hintin' that I'm tryin' to do you, I'll make that long leg of yours match the short one."

Two hours later they left the Newry printing office, Hiram carrying a thick packet under his arm. That afternoon Hiram accompanied Mr. Root back to South Palmyra.

Being an eminently practical man, with little interest in the supernatural, Sheriff Sproul promptly forgot about Cophetua Root's family spooks and their manifestations, and occupied himself for two days or so with the press-

ing affairs of his office, the still refractory prisoner in the doghole continuing to be an important element in his duties.

Then came one who bore a look of deep concern between the borders of beard that framed his features, and stated that he was the first selectman of Palmyra.

"And we want the thing stopped right where it is by force of the law, seein' that town authority ain't listened to, and him aided, abetted, and torched on by a friend of yours," declared the selectman. "It ain't so much that it's a shame and a disgrace to a quiet and law-abidin' town to have it placarded broadcast that a caterwouser is settled in our midst, playin' the tricks of the devil and his imps—it ain't so much that as it is bringin' in rough scuffs and ragtag that hitch their hosses anywhere they take a notion to, and trample down crops, and reign triumphant, and keep us all lookin' for what may come next. It's at Coph Root's tavern, and he's made a show of it, and is

rakin' in money hand over fist, and he ain't even took out a license to run a show, bein' too mean to let go of a cent. Though I can swear to it that the town officers of Palmyra would never license works of the devil, like them be."

"Before you fill up on breath and start again," advised the sheriff grimly, "you'd better conclude to give me



"Dishes flyin' and me ketchin' an aig, or whatever soft thing the caterwouser happens to find handy."

business talk instead of a bass-horn solo about your troubles. I've got troubles of my own, plenty enough to 'tend to. Now, speak pert! Are you talkin' about that old up-and-down grasshopper that claims to have a lunatic hen ha'n'tin' him, or something of the sort?"

"I be."

"Well, I'm tellin' you what I told him; I've chased a lot of fool things since I've been in this office, but I draw the line on that Palmyry thingumajig. And I hand you the opinion free gratis that I think you're all turned lunatics in that town."

"You ain't bein' called on to hunt ghosts," vociferated the first selectman, angry in his turn. "That'll be attended to in the proper way by them qualified. Understand? By them qualified. But you are here and now called on as high sheriff to come out and protect property, and suppress riots, and open doors in the name of the law. It's your duty, and if you don't come, I'll get an order from the nearest judge makin' you come. You called for business talk. That's business!"

And a moment of reflection showed the high sheriff that it was.

"When I get out there," he said, after pondering on the matter a while, "I want it understood that I ain't goin' to be asked to hunt ghosts and be made a laughin' stock of."

"That's understood," stated the selectman, with decision.

"There ain't any such things as ghosts."

"There's them that's qualified to pass on that and handle 'em," replied the other tartly. "There ain't any need of our arguin' it."

"With the thing on that official basis," stated the sheriff, after glaring at his visitor for a moment, "I'll attend to duties that's set down for me. Look for me at your place to-morrow."

And the high sheriff of Cuxabaxis was on hand.

There was no mistaking the scene of the disturbance. Word of his coming had plainly gone abroad. The populace evidently proposed to be in at the crisis of affairs on Root's hill. The

old tavern was banked, front, rear, and sides, with a concourse of teams and people that blackened an acre or two. The sheriff approached the front door through a lane of spectators that opened a way for him. Hiram Look was the first to greet him. He came down out of the door where he was standing guard, plug hat on the back of his head, showman's fervor in eyes and mien.

"Town officers said you were comin', but I didn't believe it," he whispered hoarsely in the cap'n's ear. "But, now that you're here, Aaron, don't stick your fingers in. Don't take stock in any lies. They're jealous, that's all. I never promoted and developed a show with a better lay to it. No salary list. Head performer a ghost. Don't have to pay him."

"You've gone crazy, too, have you?" inquired the sheriff.

"Don't flout—don't flout," urged his friend. "We've got one—sure thing."

"Got what?"

"Cust if I know—something! Call it a caterwouser. Only expense is for props—dishes, eggs, and such fixin's. See my banner!"

The sheriff allowed his unwilling eyes to be directed to the crudely painted sign in the yard.

REAL CATERWOUSER INSIDE

Rampageous Ructions. Continuous Performance.
Now Shown For First Time.

FIFTY CENTS ADMISSION. ADULTS ONLY.
Enter At Own Risk.

Bean Dinner Served in Tent. Twenty-Five Cents.
COME ONE, COME ALL.

"He gets 'em two ways—show and meals," stated Hiram enthusiastically. "Never did such a business in his life. Now don't you butt in, Aaron, no matter what they say."

Mr. Root was in sight in the main hallway, coin and bills heaped before him on a bedroom stand. He cast triumphant gaze on the sheriff.

"You can't afford to mess in," warned Hiram. "I'm askin' you as a special favor."



Apparently it had been aimed at him, and with a true aim, at that.

"This here ain't a matter of friendship." The sheriff was plainly obstinate. "When you get to managin' a fake peep-show, you've got to take your chances with me like anybody else. I'm here to suppress a nuisance. And if there's one goin' on, I'm goin' to suppress it." He yanked away from Hiram's hand.

The first selectman of Palmyra, backed by his two associates on the board, had been standing at a little distance, showing due, though rather surly, respect for this private conference. The cap'n's impatient breaking of the tête-à-tête was the signal for their advance.

"We'd like to see you private, sher-

iff," announced the first selectman. And Cap'n Sproul accompanied them into one of the tavern barns, the door of which a town constable with an obtrusive nickel badge was guarding.

There was a man in the barn, its only occupant. He was walking around and around the spacious floor at a brisk gait. He was a little man, such a little man that the cap'n, casting one careless glance at him, took him for a boy. Corduroy knickerbockers added to the illusion. He had a glazed valise on his back and another to balance it strapped in front.

"First I want to inform you that I'm keepin' my promise about not botherin' you with the supernatural end of this case," stated the first selectman. "We have the mediator, here, to attend to that part. If there is such a thing as a ghost he's duly qualified to settle its goose for it."

"Mediator?" demanded the cap'n. "That it?" He stared at the little man who circled their group at a lively clip.

"I'm mediator between man and the higher forces, said forces being the spirit forces," announced the subject of attention, not pausing in his travels. "Have a spirit band of ten thousand marching at my back all the time. All good spirits. They control evil spirits. Fight 'em! Lick 'em! Terror to devils!"

"Of course, we ain't takin' any responsibility, in the ghost part, one way or the other," stated the selectman. "If there's a ghost in there, then here's a man that makes it his specialty. If there ain't any ghost, it's simply a stand off. Anyway, you can talk with him. It sounds to us that he knows what he's talkin' about. You'll have to let him keep walkin' all the time. Says he can't sit down or stand still. Says the spirits keep him on the move."

"That's it. Can't stop. Spirit band always on the march," declared the little man, cutting another circle.

"If you think I'm goin' to stand here and carry on any hop-and-skip conversation with that human flea, you've miscal'lated," the sheriff in-

formed them. "Now, you show me just where you want me to grab in on the official end of this hoorah, and I'll get busy toward straightening it out. But when you quit bein' sensible, then I quit."

"We want entrance gained to that house."

"Pay your fifty cents and go in, and reckon that a fool and his money is soon parted. That ain't my business. I'm here to disperse this mob, on your complaint as town officers."

"You don't understand. We want entrance gained for the mediator. They won't let him in."

"Why?"

"Because Coph Root is afraid he'll lay the ghost and stop the show. He don't want it stopped now. He's changed his mind since last week. He don't care how much chiny is smashed, so long as the crowds keep comin'."

"Do you mean to tell me," inquired the sheriff, when a little meditation enabled him to grasp the situation, "that you've canoodled me out into this town to be used as a can-opener for that dried-up shrimp of a dancin' kododabus, there?"

"If gainin' entrance in the name of the law to a place where a nuisance is goin' on and devil's tricks are bein' played to the hurt and expense of a community, ain't right in the line of a sheriff's duty, then I wait to be informed what is," declared the selectman stoutly. His confrères grunted in-dorsement.

"You keep away from me, the whole of you!" barked the cap'n. "You're all lunatics. There ain't any help or dependence in you. It's up to me to straighten this thing out alone, but you needn't be afraid but what I can do it. And I warn ye to keep away from me."

He started out of the barn.

"Follow the sheriff," the selectman ordered the mediator. "When he goes into the house, you go in, too."

"If he follows me, I'll mallywhack him into inch pieces," stormed Cap'n Sproul, whirling on them.

"Follow on—I'll follow on," said the

little man valiantly. "With ten thousand spirits at my back, I'll follow on. I'm protected. You can't hurt me."

The sheriff clawed his stubby beard and fixed blistering gaze on this persistent satellite. The satellite did not flinch. He had the courage of his mania. The sheriff spread his right hand with itching desire to cuff the mediator's ears. But his common sense triumphed over his indignation. He reflected that bickering with the little man was like shooin' a buzz fly. He went on out of the barn, general marshal of a parade, seen and unseen, of eleven thousand—to accept the mediator's figures. Whether or not the sheriff felt subconsciously how well he was supported, he went up against the enemy determinedly. He shouldered Hiram to one side when that distressed gentleman tried to draw him apart for another conference.

Mr. Root saw him coming, the mediator at his heels, and perceived in the sheriff the tool of his persecutors. He rose on his sound leg, and propped himself in the doorway.

"You can't come in," he cried shrilly. "You can't come in with any such ragtag. I'm mindin' my own business in my own house, and you go off and leave me be."

The crowd had backed away, to allow the sheriff and his persistent follower opportunity to approach the door, their politeness dictated by obvi-

ous reasons. With the combatants once in the arena, the crowd closed in.

Cap'n Sproul strove to control himself. He did not want to furnish any more of a free show to the populace than he was obliged to. He was required to display dignity, he reasoned.

"Mr. Root, a few days ago you called on me in my office and asked me to come out here and take a hand in protectin' your property. Now, I—"

"And you wouldn't come," cried Root. "I call on ye all to hear that he wouldn't come. He sassed me, and wouldn't come."

"But now I have come and I'll look into this thing officially."

"Look into your grandmother's bean barrel!" sneered the proprietor of the caterwouser. "I haven't got anything that I want looked into. And I order you not to come into this house. You wouldn't come when I wanted you, and now I don't want you. I've changed my mind."

"And I've changed mine, and so we start even," said the cap'n, feeling his temper getting away from him. "I've been sent for by your town officers, and I propose—"

A shattering crash of glass above interrupted him. And it warned him, as well. He looked up just in time to dodge a big water ewer that had been dashed through one of the tavern's upper windows. Apparently, it had been aimed at him, and with a true aim, at that. When he ducked, he uncovered



An egg struck him squarely in the back of the neck.

the mediator at his heels. The ewer struck the glazed valise that the little man carried in front. The little man was driven flat on his back, and the crockery was smashed into bits that flew in every direction.

"That will show ye that we ain't to be interfered with," shouted Mr. Root triumphantly. "You travel here at your own risk. Private way, dangerous! That's good law for you, Mister Sheriff!"

With seaman's instinct in time of trouble, Cap'n Sproul kept cautious eye aloft. This was fortunate, for through the jagged hole that the ewer had made another missile came hurtling. It looked to the startled cap'n like a queer sort of bomb. He dodged again with more briskness, and again the mediator was uncovered. The little man had just scrambled up. The flying object struck him squarely in the face. It burst with an exaggerated "plop" that was like a muffled explosion, and again the mediator went down, overcome as much by astonishment as by the force of the blow.

For one awful instant the sheriff stood aghast. He forgot to watch the dangerous window. His eyes were all for the mediator, struggling on the ground. That unfortunate's features were entirely obliterated.

"My Gawd!" gasped a man in the crowd. "Look at him! Just one gore of blood!"

The mediator, with a vitality that seemed shocking in one who had been apparently wounded unto death, squirmed into a sitting posture and began frantically to claw his hands over his face. He restored a portion of his features.

"It's blood and brains!" he managed to ejaculate after a time.

Cap'n Sproul straddled across the mediator, and picked up the remnants of the object that had come from the window. It was a bag of thick paper, burst. The cap'n sniffed at it, stuck his finger in the sticky mess that oozed from the rent, tasted it, and tossed away the bag. He started for the door.

"I'll find out who's bombardin' the sheriff of this county with a gob of molasses in a bag," he roared. "And you get in my way, Old Hop-and-Fetch-It," he declared, at the threshold, "and I'll level your gait for you!"

Root raised a chair, desperate in his determination to protect his source of fortune, but the sheriff bowled him over before he could strike. And at the sheriff's heels trotted the mediator, reassuring himself by licking his fingers.

Cap'n Sproul was not in the mood for painstaking detective search. He made hotfoot for the upper story. He hoped to catch the miscreant red-handed. It never occurred to his practical understanding that there could be any agency except flesh and blood behind the manifestations.

But he found no one in the room from which the objects had been thrown. There were bits of broken china on the floor of the room, and the floors of the corridors and of other apartments into which he popped his head were similarly littered.

Root had left his post at the door, and came up the stairs. He carried a club, and was stuttering threats. Behind him thronged the populace. But Cap'n Sproul planted himself at the head of the stairs, his sturdy legs astride. He pulled a revolver and a billy, his sheriff's outfit of war, that never before had he displayed. He rolled his coat away, to show his gold badge.

"Root and the rest," he said, in a tone that halted them, "this place is just now in the hands of the high sheriff of this county. Whys, wherefores, rights, and so forth will be argued later. But you go downstairs, and stay there, Root and all, or you are goin' to get your come-uppance. I see you, theré, Hiram. You'd better advise 'em that when I'm up and really goin' I'm just the kind of a man they want to keep away from!"

Hiram forthwith advised. He was sententious, but he was cogent. And the crowd backed out of doors.

Cap'n Sproul missed the mediator

when he turned again to resume his inspection of the premises. He found him when he passed the door of the room from which the missiles had been thrown. The mediator was frisking about, making strange passes in the air, and muttering to himself. He turned a smeared, but undismayed, face to the sheriff.

"Can't scare me, they can't!" he chirped. "Can't scare me, with my ten thousand spirits at my back!"

"What do you think you're doin' here?"

"Layin' it! It won't ever appear again after I get done. Can't scare me!" He went on, gyrating about the room. The cap'n left him there, as something too trivial to bother with.

Everywhere the sheriff found the wreck of crockery. The marks of the eggs that had formed the subject of Mr. Root's earlier complaints were plentiful and much in evidence. He was interestedly examining the ceiling of one room, that had been garnished in egg tints with especial lavishness, when he was treated to a concrete example. An egg struck him squarely in the back of the neck. Naturally, the attention of a man struck with an egg is focused wholly on the egg. But Cap'n Sproul was not so distracted that he failed to hear the click of a door bolt. The door into the hall was open. He stood in his tracks, and sopped at his neck with wadded handkerchief, and stared with interest at another door, that was closed. Then he walked to it and tried it. It was locked. He surged against it. It cracked.

"Who is trying to break into my room?" cried a female voice.

"You needn't worry about me," growled the sheriff. "Who's in here?"

"I'm Mr. Root's daughter, and I'm bedrid with this awful excitement. You please go away at once."

The sheriff stood there, his hand on the knob, for a long time. His eyes, set in a far-seeing stare, seemed looking beyond the door as he pondered.

"Have you gone?" asked the woman's voice finally. "I want you to go away at once."

But still Cap'n Sproul remained there in a brown study.

"You are no gentleman—I can tell that much about you, even if I can't see you," declared the voice within. "You go away!"

"Yes'm," returned the sheriff mildly. He left the door, and trudged out. His meditation seemed to have given him a purpose.

"If you're goin' to catch a mouse," he muttered, "you've got to have a mouse trap *and* cheese to bait it with. And here's the cheese—and it ain't much else."

He turned in at the room where the mediator was actively practicing his charms.

"Can't scare me!" he repeated.

"Glad of it," commented the cap'n, and added to himself: "Because what I'm goin' to do to you might jump a man that didn't have ten thousand spirits to bolster him up."

There was an old-fashioned corded bed in one corner of the room. He whipped out his knife and cut a liberal length of cord. He wound the cord around his arm, picked up a chair, and took the mediator by the collar with the other hand. He started for the door with him.

"Leave me be! He ain't laid yet," squawked the little man.

"What are you using me this way for?" he remonstrated in the corridor.

"Bait," was the cap'n's enigmatic reply.

When he had his captive within hearing distance of the one behind the closed door, he raised his voice.

"I've got you!" he shouted. "You're the chap that's been doin' all this hulloaloo business here in this house. I've caught you. Don't you yip a word. I saw you do it."

The little man appeared to be frozen with fright in the hands of this burly captor, who seemed to have suddenly gone mad. He went along limply. He lay back limply in the chair when the cap'n pushed him into it and began to bind him there.

"I'm goin' to tie you good and solid," he roared, making certain that

the woman would hear. "You're a desperate critter. You needn't be afraid, marm. He can't get away after I've got him trussed up. There ain't any slip nooses in these sailor knots. Yes, and, my fine fellow, I'm goin' to blindfold you. I ain't goin' to take any chances. I'm goin' to blindfold you till I get back with help to carry you off to jail. I reckon you won't play ghost much with them cords on you." He worked briskly at the knots as he talked. "You needn't be at all afraid, marm. He can't wiggle nor see till I get back. There won't be any demonstrations in this house after I get him clewed up."

He finished the last knot.

"I'll put her on her mettle," he pondered. At the doorway, on his retreat, he shouted: "I've got the ghost of Root's tavern coopered. Ten dollars to one for all takers!"

"You've made me sit down," quavered the mediator, daring at last to remonstrate. "Can't sit down! Have to move!"

"It's time for an old gent like you to take it easy for a spell," advised the cap'n. "Keep your settin'."

He banged the door of the room after himself with much ostentation, and began to mark time in the hall, carefully moderating the tread of his heavy shoes to simulate the diminuendo of retreat. With a few vigorous pokes of his big jackknife he made a peephole in the door, ceased tramping up and down, and watched.

Decidedly, it was a neat trap, well baited.

After a while the barred door was drawn cautiously ajar. The mediator's back was toward the door, and he was blindfolded. It was a rare opportunity for any able-bodied ha'n't. So the spook appeared. It was a buxom young woman in a print wrapper. Making sure that the coast was clear, she ran out and batted the terror-stricken mediator over the head with a pillow, and then emptied the feathers upon his molasses-smeared face.



She emptied the feathers upon his molasses-smeared face.

The high sheriff of Cuxabexis had her in his grasp before she was able to bolt her door. He pushed her into her room and closed the door himself behind them.

"Now, marm," he said, "the readin' on this badge of mine is plain print. You see who I am. Get on your bonnet!"

The suddenness of her exposure and capture seemed to have paralyzed the young woman. She leaned against the wall, and stared at him, open-mouthed and wide-eyed. Then her lips began to quiver, and big

tears rolled down her cheeks. Cap'n Sproul watched her, grim and uncompromising outwardly, but beginning to weaken a bit within. Her distress was real and touching. Curiosity began to stir him.

"Do you mean that I'm arrested, sir?" she faltered, at last.

"Yessum," he returned crisply. Her swimming eyes were upraised to his. Sympathy of the instinctive sort stirred, too, as well as his curiosity. A girl with those eyes could not be a very desperate criminal.



She leaned against the wall, and stared at him, open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

"I suppose I deserve it," she confessed. "I didn't stop to think of the consequences. But one thing led to another, and I just let myself go."

"Meanin' that you think you're one of them critters they call 'mediums,' and couldn't help cuttin' up all these infernal actions?"

"I don't claim to be any such thing," she retorted smartly. "I won't hide behind any excuses. I'm not a coward!"

That honesty was refreshing, the cap'n decided.

"Lookahere, marm," he blurted, "sailor or landsman, I never was unjust to a woman if I knew it. Set down there in that chair, and tell me what in thunderation ever possessed you to kick up like this."

It was not the tone of the official autocrat. It was bluff and genial and parental. It invited confidence and confession. And the young woman impetuously embraced the opportunity.

"He ordered me up here, and kept me a prisoner. He wouldn't let me go downstairs."

"Who?"

"My father. And of course I walked in the night. Who wouldn't walk? I

couldn't keep still, feeling the way I did."

"And he reckoned there was a ha'nt on the premises, eh?"

"He was silly enough to think so," she said tartly, "and I let him think so, and when he began to talk about it I proceeded to give him some extra proofs. You don't realize what a state of mind I've been in, sir. He made me forget that he was my father."

"Took it out on him, eh? And how about the general public?"

"The gaping fools didn't get anything but what they deserved."

"I'm goin' to be so bold as to say, young woman, that I kind of like your spirit," acknowledged the cap'n, "though perhaps, as sheriff, I ought to feel different. But spirit always catches me. Now, the main point is, what is it all about?"

Her cheeks blazed, and her eyes were bright.

"The young man that I think more of than I do any one else in the world has started the new tavern at the foot of the hill, and my father simply worked out his grudge by trying to make me give him up. That's the whole story, Mr. Sheriff, and any one

in this town will tell you that a better young man never trod shoe leather."

The cap'n fondled his nose and gazed at her with interest.

"But he ain't got any spirit," he objected. "I don't know him, but he's shown that much by leavin' you here to fight it out alone."

"I've told you so much, I may as well tell the rest," she confided trustfully. "I don't want to be arrested, sir. He's got all arrangements made, and he's going to come and get me to-night. And if my father gets in his way he'll be hurt, that's all!"

The cap'n pondered.

"They say," he commented, at last, "that love always finds a way. But I'll be billy-come-battered if the way he's took in this case ain't out of sound-in's on any courtship chart I ever come acrost." He took a deep breath, and gazed at the young woman for a long time. "Miss," he stated finally, "I reckon that what your honored parent has lost in personal property he has made up in gate receipts. I'm goin' to cal'late so, and from what I've seen of him he's a man that I don't like, anyway. Wait till it's pretty dark, and get away easy, and I hope you'll be happy ever after. Them's my best sentiments, and there ain't any need of further long speeches."

He shook hands with her, and trudged out. He untied the mediator, and escorted that still dumfounded person down into the yard, where the

populace was waiting. The spectators blinked hard at the feathered apparition.

"Gents, one and all," said Cap'n Sproul, "this little man at the present time ain't any fit picture for a high-toned album, but I want to say to you that he's a wonder. Up to now I haven't believed much in ha'nts, or that any one could lay them if there was ha'nts. But this man has done the job. That caterwouser is laid."

"You're a liar," shouted Mr. Root.

"Your opinion of me ain't worth resentin'," replied the cap'n calmly. "You might as well take down your sign, Uncle Up-and-Down. I personally"—with a side glance he caught sight of the daughter's rosy face at an upper window—"I personally offer one hundred dollars reward for any other demonstration that occurs on these premises. Now, stir up your caterwouser, if you think you've still got one. But you haven't. I'm goin' home, and I'd advise the rest of you fools to keep your fifty-cent pieces in your pockets, and go along home, too. You come with me, Hiram. I'll give you a ride, and tell you a story."

And, after a few hours of waiting had shown them that the sheriff had told the truth, the people went away, and left Mr. Root sitting in lonely state behind his little table in the hall. And the mediator, at a safe distance from Mr. Root's resentment, watched the house, to put a quietus on any possible fresh outbreak.





I gathered in the pauses of rehearsal that there were to be two supper parties, to neither of which I had been bidden.

My Stage Career

By Virginia Middleton

III.

[The first of these articles, descriptive of the actual experiences of an average girl, ambitious for a stage career, appeared in the November number of this magazine.]

ILLUSTRATED BY H. VON S. LUCAS

MY first night had been somewhat different from the first night of my long dreams. The reality had been dingy, unfriendly, nerve-racking. What the anticipations had been, every girl who has ever suffered from my complaint, stage fever, knows well enough—they had been of brightly lighted dressing rooms, of eager, affable, enthusiastic fellow actors, of a beautifully dressed audience full of the most admiring sentiments and gifted with great facility in the expression of the same. They had been of a delighted playwright, of a personal distinction

which not even the smallness of one's part could obliterate, of flowers, perhaps of a company jubilee supper—oh, we all know the stuff such dreams are made of!

Mr. Pennington, I believe, was moderately well satisfied with our interpretation of his characters; but it was immediately clear that there must be a lot of cutting and rehashing done on the play before it would make a New York success. The local critics were kind, and the New York ones who had come up to see the opening performance of a companion's work, did as

they would be done by in the matter of notices, the least favorable suggesting that, with a few changes, the play would be all that a play should be, and the others declaring that it was already that.

Well, there was great bother of rehearsing, of chopping, and changing—and there were heated remarks when the leading woman's best line was declared to be unnecessary, and the one tart speech allowed the vivacious old lady was snatched relentlessly from her, and when the juvenile had his opportunity of conspicuousness taken from him by a stern command not to saunter across the stage at a certain point. There was even one blind, sickening, despairing moment when some one suggested the elimination of the scene with the maid. But it was found that, after all, the action of the play hinged upon the servant's delivery of that message about madame's being at home, so I was allowed to breathe again.

And so the week wore on, generally on the Hartford level of dullness, but with one episode rather more enlivening, when certain intoxicated youths of New Haven set themselves the sportive task of "breaking up the show," and in furtherance of their playful ambition fired ancient cabbages, ribald jests, wads of paper from blowpipes, and overripe cucumbers upon the performers, for a few brief minutes before they were ejected from the box they occupied. It was an excellent jest for young gentlemen to play. One of the paper wads struck me full on the eyelid as I turned from my dusting of madame's dressing table to take her message. It was a great moment for me, for whereas madame faltered for a moment in saying: "Celeste, go to the drawing-room and say to Mr. Greer—say to Mr. Greer—" I, though my eyelid was stinging, and I had not been able to prevent a motion of recoil as the nasty thing smote me, nevertheless kept my feet and my face and my self-control, and remarked ringingly: "I am to say then madame is home?"

Such part of the audience as was not engaged in shouting: "Put 'em out, the

rowdies!" or in assisting the rowdies to declaim against the "bum show," called out "Brava, brava!" and applauded very loudly. And the next morning madame and I received favorable mention in the papers for our admirable self-control. My eye was almost closed for a week by the incident, but one of the ingénues, Janet Perrier, as she was upon the programme, grew kind, and taught me how to paint the poor feature so that I should not look quite so much like the wife of a husband addicted to drink, and to the chastisement of his own.

And so we came to New York, and opened there. Then was the time of true excitement. Everything depended upon it, I heard the company assuring one another. We got in town Sunday forenoon, and were called for a rehearsal of the revised play at once. I went back to my Stuyvesant Square boarding house—for the winter, I thought—and the boarders seemed quite like old friends. Most of them asked me for free tickets to the opening night of the play—whereby I learned just what a "large personal following" really means. The more people one knows, the more people expect seats at one's performances for nothing.

I felt a little sad and forlorn on Sunday when I gathered from the talk that went on around me, in the pauses of rehearsal, that there were to be two supper parties the next night, after the play, to neither of which had I been bidden. The Penningtons were to have the star and the leading woman at their apartment to meet another playwright, a critic, and another actress. The "old woman" and her husband were entertaining the ingénues and some others at what was referred to as a cheese fest. I was out of it. And it took all my courage and common sense not to allow that fact to depress me fearfully. I was only twenty, and I had come from such a cheerful, sociable home.

On Monday afternoon we were rehearsing one or two scenes over again. I was at the theatre rather because I

could not keep away from it than because my eight words needed any further practice. The "juvenile" was lounging about with a rather sour look on his face. He approached me where I sat, down in the darkened auditorium, watching the scene above me that would look so different to-night when stage and actors were dressed for their parts.

"Are you going to either of these blooming supper parties to-night, Miss Pierson? No? Neither am I. The Penningtons can't ask me—though the old boy apologized for it—because Her High-and-Mightiness, Miss Livingstone, won't speak to me off the stage—she's never forgiven me for not falling in love with her when she gave me the chance."

"Oh!" gasped I, horrified at his words.

"Fact, I assure you. And Mrs. Elwell has no use for me because she wanted her son to have this part; and, of course, Robmeyer, who has a few glimmerings of sense, though he is a fool in the main, wouldn't hear of it. So I'm out of it—like you. You're too pretty for the old cats to want you."

My face flamed at the coarseness of the man.

"I am a stranger to Mrs. Elwell," I said, "and there is no earthly reason why she should ask me to a gathering of her intimates." I was stalwartly repeating the words with which I had been trying to keep up my own courage, and to fight my loneliness all the afternoon. "And, of course, it would be absurd for the Penningtons to invite me to a supper of notabilities."

"You're a plucky one," Mr. Thornton assured me. "What do you say to our having a bite together after the show is over? To tell you the truth, it makes me hot under the collar to see the prettiest girl in the company, and the best-bred one, left out of their precious merrymakings."

Let the fact that I was only twenty be my excuse—only twenty, and yearning for companionship, and alone for the first time. I actually accepted the cad's invitation to supper after the

performance. I did not do it altogether blindly; I knew he was not what we would call, at home, a "nice man." But I was desperately lonesome, I did feel abandoned and neglected, a little snubbed, and very much "out of it." Any expression of human sympathy and appreciation, even when it was couched in such terms as Mr. Thornton's, appealed to me.

It served me quite right that, after all, Mrs. Elwell should come to me just before the performance that evening and should say: "Oh, Miss Pierson, some of the company are coming up to our place to-night for a bite after the performance. We'd be awfully glad if you would come—I didn't quite dare to ask you before, for I wasn't sure you wouldn't think me forcing an acquaintance. But we'd be so glad—and Jane lives down your way, so that you two girls could get home all right."

"I'm so sorry," said I truthfully, "but I have an engagement." I didn't mention with whom—for had not Mr. Thornton declared that Mrs. Elwell had wanted his position for her son?

"Oh," said she rather flatly. Then, vaguely: "Some other time, we shall hope for you then."

And when she saw me waiting in the dressing room during the first and second and third entr'actes, she understood that my engagement was with some member of the company, and, of course, by the easiest process of elimination, she was able to decide with whom. Her manner resumed its formal chilliness, and I believed, for the time, Thornton's story of the ground of her dislike. I knew better later. I learned that even in the easy, tolerant, unexacting circles in which he moved, he was regarded as "impossible," and that I had done all I could to give myself a black eye in the estimation of my associates when I accepted his invitation to supper.

It was a horrid enough supper, though it was held in a green-and-gold and glittering restaurant, and although Thornton tried to establish himself in my opinion as an epicure. The place swarmed with flashily dressed women

and men who eyed them with a proprietary look. There was a band in a railed-off balcony which played very well, but I could scarcely hear it above the din of loud voices, loud laughter, the rattle of dishes, the hurrying of waiters. For the first fifteen minutes, the scene interested me and amused me. After that it made me feel uncomfortable.

My escort drank copiously of the champagne which he ordered and which I resolutely declined, clinging to some of the principles of Windy River. He regaled me with anecdotes of the people in the restaurant—most of whom seemed to be unfavorably known to him—and with tales of the members of the company, redounding to their discredit. How I wished that I were with the Elwells at their "cheese fest," talking over the performance—which, by the way, had been greeted with what seemed to me the utmost enthusiasm—and having an almost homelike time.

Finally we went home, and a climax was placed upon the evening's mistakes when the now maudlin Mr. Thornton tried to kiss me, in the vestibule of my boarding house. I got into the house, and slammed the door rudely and unmistakably in his face. Then I went upstairs to scrub the almost-polluted cheek and to reflect upon the difference in manners in Windy River and Broadway. I made up my mind never to speak to him again, but I could not keep the resolution, for his manner the next day was entirely matter-of-fact.

The next evening the play seemed to fall flat. I could not understand it, in view of the applause and excitement of the first night, until Janet Perrier enlightened my ignorance by gloomily informing me that the first night's audience had been "paper"—had been composed of the author's friends, the friends of the actors, and such enthusiasts. By the end of the week we were playing to empty galleries, the orchestra being quite roomy enough to hold all our supporters, and any one who bought any ticket being given an ad-

mission check and with it an orchestra coupon, so that we need not face that most discouraging of all sights, an empty auditorium. By the beginning of the second week even this device did not prevent vast stretches of emptiness in the orchestra. At the end of the second week we closed. The star bitterly blamed Mr. Pennington for the play; Mr. Pennington said, confidentially, that he himself did not blame the public for not supporting his play as performed by a company of blacksmiths; he only wished that it might have been judged through an adequate representation.

But after all, their recriminations and disappointments concerned me but little. Here was I, at the beginning of October, when all contracts had been signed for the season and all the bookings had been made, thrown out of a job. I had received sixty dollars for my work; I had spent seven on materials for my maid's costume and for my cap, apron, shoes, belt, and accessories in general. Thank goodness, I had known how to do a simple piece of cutting, fitting, and sewing, and the making of the frock had cost me nothing. But the Connecticut week had been expensive, even though I had patronized only the grimest of hotels. It had cost me sixteen dollars. My board during the two New York weeks had been sixteen dollars, and I had bought a few things to replenish my wardrobe. It does not require an expert accountant to tell how much I had left.

Began again the dreary tramp to offices, the waitings, the snubbings. Began again the worriment, the gloom. Began the doubts of my choice of an occupation. Occasionally doubts of my own talent would cross my mind. These I used to try to banish by my private rehearsals of my favorite parts before the section of mirror in my room. It was discouraging work—watching in a square foot of looking-glass, under the high, flickering gas of a boarding-house hall room, for the witching expressions of *Beatrice*, and *Rosalind*, and the rest of them.

But now, at least, I had had some experience. It wasn't much, but even a little counts. I had proved that I would not become actually panic-paralyzed when the moment came for me to appear on the stage; I had proved that I could speak a simple sentence without being overcome with fright. It wasn't much, but it was something. And I kept on haunting offices with a dogged persistence which ought to have won me success. Finally it did—after a fashion. One day Tommy, the factotum of the Greenfelt offices, signaled me to follow him into Mr. Ferret's room.

"Ah, my belligerent young friend," said Mr. Ferret genially. "I hear that the outraged populace of a cultivated New England city tried to drive you off the stage. The people are long suffering, but they won't bear everything—why will you attempt to act and goad the thoughtful and scholarly to such lengths as these?"

I was a little bewildered by the change in his manner. He smiled at my expression, and then said:

"Sit down, Miss Pierson. I've got something for you—the chance of a lifetime. A speaking part in one of our road companies which is doing 'War's Alarms.' Ever see it? Great play. Speaking part, chance to understudy Miss Martinez and—twenty dollars a week."

I can't possibly describe how he rolled forth that sum as if he were offering me a share in the Golconda mine.

"Road company?" said I weakly. Whither vanished New York if I went out on the road?

"Road company—don't take it if you don't want it. Don't take it if Frohman wants you at the Empire to bring up the tone of the house this winter, or——"

"I'll take it," I hurried to interrupt him.

"That's a sensible girl. It's the chance of your life. When I read in the papers that you hadn't blubbered when the fellows tried to run you off the stage in New Haven, I said to my-

self; 'That little pepper box is a good fellow, and if anything turns up when old Pennington's play is taken off—it ran ten nights longer than I allowed it in my mind; no critic knows how to write a play—when I saw that, I said to myself that I'd keep an eye out for little pepper box.'"

He patted me on the shoulder, and I sat quite rigid. I did not want to squirm obviously. After all, it had been very kind of him, and he meant no harm.

I learned afterward that I had been hired to replace a woman who had had thirty dollars a week for her work. But Mr. Ferret probably thought that his genial line of talk and his shoulder patting ought to be worth ten dollars a week to a beginner.

It also developed that Miss Martinez was a difficult proposition—a young woman with a "pull" with "our" office, into the nature of which no one inquired too closely, and with a temper. And she had stipulated that she wanted a "lady this time, and no more of those frights you've been sending me. Some one I can speak to in a strange town without being ashamed to do it."

Now, though I was not aware of it then, it was phenomenal good fortune which I had had in getting a second chance after the failure of my first. Only the very popular stars are ever sure of such success. Good actors, old actors, men and women concerning whose ability to meet all the demands which the modern playwright is likely to place upon their art there could be no doubt, can never be assured that if the first play for which they sign for a season has only a brief run, they will have another chance all the winter. When one realizes this enormous element of speculation which the actor is obliged to take with every new part; and when one realizes also that the best season is only forty weeks long, the large-sounding salaries which some of them enjoy are not so illy earned.

Since that first season, I have more than once opened the autumn in a play which was early seen to be a fail-



Where I might stretch myself out and go to sleep with my head on my coat.

ure, and I have not always had the luck that attended me that first season. For one thing, I should not be so likely now to leap at the chance of undertaking a thirty-dollar job at a twenty-dollar salary, but then there are thousands of girls, situated as I was then, who would fairly jump at the chance. More than one winter I have spent looking for work, concerning my ability to do which there was no question. More than one winter I have lived on the scanty savings of the preceding one.

But that first winter I had the success I have just mentioned. I joined one of the Greenfelt road companies for twenty dollars a week, and began an experience which I honestly believe to be the most physically wearing one in the world, an experience which not even the big favorites entirely escape, an experience which a man or woman may not evade by reason of advancing years, as he can the hardships of many other professions—I mean the short-stand engagements. That winter I played twenty-three weeks of one-night stands and four weeks of two or three-night stands.

Now, one-night stands are not booked for New York, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Washington—

for the cities of many good hotels, of agreeable lodging houses, of creature comforts generally. They are arranged for the small towns where one, or at the best, two hotels, worthy of patronage may be found. They are arranged for the little towns where the "opera house" is the one temple of amusement, and the back-of-the-stage arrangements of the opera house are something that would make the tenement-house commission of a large city take immediate action. The draughts and the dampness of subterranean dressing rooms! The unventilated closeness of them!

When I first joined Miss Marinez and the company which was playing "War's Alarms," I battled every night for a week with giddiness and dizziness after I had dressed in an unwholesome little box, reeking with a smell of burnt cork, of many scented brands of powder, of rouge, of flaring gas, of ancient plumbing in an adjoining room, and of warm and sticky human flesh. I used to make my way from the noisome little pest holes of that week's circuit, and court my death, shivering in the draughty wings. I had half a dozen sentences to speak in the new play, and changed my dress once—which was an expensive honor since I

was obliged to buy the two costumes; but, fortunately, I was supposed to be a rather dowdy sit-by-the-fire-and-mend-stockings aunt, and the homeliness of my attire was really "good art" as well as good economy.

When the performance was over, our action depended on the train schedule of the railroad upon which we were traveling. Many a night that dreary winter I have gone from the theatre to the railroad station and sat in the waiting room from twelve until three or four, blessing my stars if there was a separate room for women where I might stretch myself out on a bench and go to sleep with my head on my coat. I did this, not only to be ready for the early morning, second-class train which was to bear the company crawling through the country to the next stop, but also because I did not wish to pay for another night's lodging at a hotel where I would be able to spend only three hours. That salary of twenty dollars a week had its limitations.

I lived that winter in a constant dread of falling ill, and of being left behind in one of the dreary little towns in which we played. It was the fate that befell one of the girls in the company, and, after that, I had it always before my mind, a haunting horror. She had been a friendly soul—Haldene Wetmore, as she was called; it seemed a pity that with so imposing and carefully worked-up a name, she should never have arrived at the place in her profession where any one would remember it. She was a slim young thing, careless, untidy, forgetful, discouraged now about her future—she had been on the stage six years and had been without an engagement about half of that time—and she had an alarming cough and an afternoon temperature when I joined the company. She was the only person in it who welcomed me with any show of pleasure, and I responded by caring a great deal for her as the weeks passed.

When she gave out—it was at a place called Modena in western Pennsylvania—the best that there was in

the whole company came to life, and I, who had been somewhat priggishly criticising their looks, their abilities, their manners and morals, felt that their generosity then made up for many shortcomings. Everybody "chipped in" royally to pay Haldene's expenses while she stayed in Modena; everybody told her to call upon him or her if she wasn't able to join the company again in two or three days—though we all assured her that, of course, she would be. There being no florist in the place, as far as we could discover, Harding, our leading man, invaded a house—it proved to be a rectory—in which he saw a glassed-in piazza abloom, and brought her back a mass of growing, bright things to cheer her. Miss Martinez insisted upon lending her fine night-gowns and two dressing gowns of most inviting warmth and prettiness "to see the doctor in." The bookstand in the station was bought out. The doctor was subsidized. And we all went away in a glow of emotion and generosity.

And yet it was that same Miss Martinez who, that same night at Leroy, slapped her dresser with a hairbrush, and it was that same Harding who, that same night at Leroy, passed from confiding to one of the girls how he was misunderstood by his wife, how he and she "had grown apart"; how she took no interest in his career, "except the salary," to maudlinly assuring the girl that with *her* he might be a different person, a better actor, a nobler man; and to suggesting that she was surely too broad-minded a woman—indeed, too high and pure-minded a woman—to believe that there was any particular sanctity about words uttered before a priest; and the girl who, that forenoon, had left three-fourths of her week's salary with her sick friend, listened.

The girl—Elizabeth Greer—shared my room that night at the Leroy Mansion House. We were not to leave until an eleven-o'clock train the next morning, so that we were squandering a dollar and a half upon our lodging and breakfast. Bessie didn't come in to enjoy her portion of our purchase

until about one o'clock, and when her coming had wakened me, she reported Harding's conversation with her.

"Why do you listen to him? Why didn't you—where were you, anyway?" I asked.

"Oh, he asked me to have a bite and sup with him after the performance, and I went."

"I didn't know there were any restaurants here."

"He'd been here before, and he knew a place where they'd fix you up a meal. It wasn't exactly a restaurant. More of a room back of—oh, well, a café."

"Bessie Greer!" I exclaimed reprobatly. "How could you do such a thing?"

"My dear, I was hungry and lonesome. And Harding had always been a gentleman——"

"He seems to have talked like one to-night!" I commented.

"Well, it's the first time he ever talked that way. He wouldn't have done it, if he hadn't had a highball or two too many. He'll have forgotten all about it in the morning. Anyway, you see I'm here. I've not gone off with him. And, furthermore, I had a very good supper."

With a very obstinate tilt of her chin she uttered the last words. I felt my eyes fill with tears. The day had been emotionally wearing, what with leaving our poor Haldene sick in a strangers' town, with hurried journeying, with the daily strain of portraying passions not our own. And now to hear this pretty girl talking in this light way! Bessie looked at me half contemptuously.

"You're a prude and a Puritan," she informed me. "As for me, I guess I know how to take care of myself without giving up every little bit of fun in life. Take what's worth while—leave what isn't; that's my motto."

And she put out the gas and skipped into bed, leaving me to reflect upon the feature of the one-night-stand life which then began to seem to me the most dreadful of them all. It made the foul, chilly dressing rooms, the constant traveling, the poor hotels with

their poor food—some day a Carnegie is going to endow not libraries, but country cooking classes—the chances of illness, sink into insignificance as trials or dangers. That feature was the loneliness of the life.

I don't know a great deal about the men of other professions besides the theatrical. I dare say that in any occupation or circle in which men and women are thrown freely together, a certain amount of emotional havoc is sure to result; I am led to this conclusion even by the reports of the happenings in the great world. Perhaps actors are no worse than other men, actresses no weaker than other women. But I am inclined to doubt even this. They are both valuable assets to their managers in proportion as they are young, good-looking, gifted with facile charm, emotional—capable of understanding and of portraying passion. Those qualities, essential in people of the theatre, are not the ones which make for placid, constant, unemotional relation between men and women. Add to these temperamental, fundamental facts, the homeless, irresponsible life of the road, and you have the material for all sorts of tragedy or melodrama.

That night it was first borne in upon my mind, with a force that the years and larger experience have only intensified, that the danger to a girl on the stage comes not from the front, but from the back, not from the men outside the stage door, but from the ones inside it. It is not the "Johnnies," but the actors—and her own natural yearnings for friendship, understanding, and sympathy—which are the menace. As for the Johnnies, I think that the actress playing in legitimate drama is little bothered with those first cousins to imbeciles. The chorus girl is their delight, rather than the real actress. Sometimes, in the smaller towns where "a show is a show," whether it be "The Black Crook" or "Macbeth," and where the show girl is a show girl, whether she is one of the "Floradora" sextet or *Juliet*, a misguided, gilded youth of scant opportunities sometimes makes a

mistake and sends notes or flowers; or waits, killingly armed with his cane, at the stage entrance. But he is easily dealt with, as a usual thing, and the only real danger that threatens the actress on the road comes from the sympathetic, agreeable member of her own company. Good heavens! Don't I know it? Don't we all know it?

I scolded Bessie Greer that night, and I was honestly shocked that she should have skulked into a room back of a bar and should have permitted a maudlin married man to insult her. But there has scarcely been a season when I myself have not been guilty of some performance only a few steps removed from the folly and degradation of this, and for exactly the same reason as led her into her recklessness—loneliness, and the desire to be soothed, and the desire to hear that I, my personality and my career, was of absorbing interest to some one.

I never went back of the barroom for my supper, I tell myself with such pride as the heroic abstinence deserves; but I have gone to dinner and supper and breakfast with men for whose character I had no particular respect, men whom I knew to be not fine, not high-minded, not even desirable acquaintances. But they were available men; they could, and did, carry my bag from station to hotel—something a girl chum couldn't, and wouldn't, have done; they flattered me, which no woman could have done so satisfactorily, even if she would do it at all; they sometimes not only gave me their conversation at meals, but even "treated" me to the dinners and suppers; and—alas, that my father's daughter should write it!—that is a consideration not to be ignored when one's precarious salary is twenty dollars a week, or in the neighborhood of twenty, and when one's expenses are only too apt to mount beyond it.

Sometimes these companionships result in actual tragedy. They did in the case of poor Bessie Greer, though Harding was not the hero of her vulgar melodrama. It was the next year, when the company in which she was

playing boasted a very gay, though married, Lothario as its chief juvenile character. He and Bessie struck up an acquaintance of the sort that she and Harding had had the preceding year; as indiscreet, and probably as innocent, for Bessie, despite her amazing notion of what constituted "taking care of herself," was at heart a decent girl, I am convinced. But when the juvenile's attentions to her were the subject of half-contemptuous railery from the other members of the company, it occurred to Madame Juvenile that she had borne all that she would bear from her husband of neglect and unfaithfulness. She was a woman who was almost a justification of the juvenile's escapades, and she decided to signalize her determination in a striking manner. So she journeyed to the town where the company was to act one week—a rather large city, with a half score of daily papers athirst for news—and she laid in wait for her husband. He and Bessie came out of the theatre together, bound, according to their wont, for supper. The scandalous scene that ensued furnished the half score of papers with their headlines the next morning. Bessie became a marked character, one whom the serious men in the profession wished to avoid, and of whom the refined women fought shy. Eventually she married "in the profession," as the saying goes, and most disastrously. For the proposal was made at a supper table, where she had weepingly held forth on the injustices of her lot to a soft-headed youth, who mistook his alcoholic sympathy for affection and a chivalric desire to protect her. They were married that same night, ringing some honest Ohio clergyman out of his sleep, and again furnishing a headline or two to the local prints. And the marriage was just as successful as one would have foretold.

And as for the rest of us, to whom these misfortunes have not fallen, we should go down upon our knees and thank our kind guardian angels, and not our own discretion, our own wisdom, our own unerring taste.

It is a pleasant thing to turn from the recollection of Bessie, and from the recollection of all the precipices along which we, too, have strayed in ignorance, in loneliness, in dissatisfaction with our lives, and recall what befell Haldene in Modena. When we left her there with Aimée Martinez's best lingerie nightgowns and dressing wrapper of pink cloth and kimono of cherry-blossom silk, and most of our salaries, I think none of us really dared to hope for her life. But she fell into the hands of a good doctor, who promptly moved her to a camp he maintained in the hills beyond the town. And there, if you please, Haldene proceeded to get well. And there no other person than the rector, whose mother's conservatory had been stripped for Haldene's benefit, used to go to see her; and, in consideration of the fact that nothing could be less expected, they fell in love with each other; and, in time, the mother was reconciled to the match, and the bishop, being of the broad-minded stripe, married them. Haldene's Christmas Sunday-school entertainments are said to be the finest in western Pennsylvania; and theatrical people, traveling through that section, are always sure of a warm welcome at the rectory—which is equally a good thing for them and the rectory.

I must not convey the impression that the whole of the short-stands' life is so dingy and dreary as to be constantly revolting. It has its physical hardships, its loneliness, and its discomfort generally. But it has some few compensations. There is no more delicious feeling of freedom, if you happen to care for freedom, than that which you have in a town where you don't know a soul. You have no duties to any one, no visits to make, no sick friends to go and cheer up, no *nothing*. There's a library, maybe. You arrive in the forenoon. After luncheon, you and one or two of the girls go for a walk, perhaps, and drop in to browse among the magazines for an hour. Or you go shopping at the grocer's and the delicatessen keeper's—though he may not

be so named in the outlying districts—and you invite the company to come to a banquet in your room after the performance. You mend your clothes. You get a good deal of embroidery finished on the centrepiece which you are making for your mother. If your night's stand is in a pretty country, and you or any of your friends are particularly "flush," you may take a drive out into it. If it is a town where any member of the company has friends, you are likely to be entertained, and the mere fact that you are on the stage is enough; you don't have to be a Duse or a Nazimova to win the large-eyed admiration, the shy "Ohs" and "Ahs" of Modena and Leroy, for example.

Sometimes even the hardships of the life take on the colors of romance or of adventure. There was the time, that first season, when we were stormbound by a blizzard somewhere in the northern part of New York. Our manager was very miserable and excited as the hours passed on, and we sat in our places, surveying as much of the snowy landscape as we could see. But by and by, when he saw that not even his worryment was going to change inexorable fate, or hasten us to our next stopping place, he yielded, and became as gay as the rest of us. To be sure, the car was cold, except at the end where a red-hot stove stood. To be sure, the train was a miserable country crawler, as Aimée Martinez called them, and there was no diner attached. To be sure, if there had been, I and the girls who received similar munificent salaries would have felt wildly extravagant had we dined in it. But we were all feeling merry that day. We laughed and sang and told stories and did bits of burlesque. And, late in the afternoon, the men made their way across the misty, snow-covered field to a house we had seen dimly blocked in the falling whiteness all day. And they came back with all sorts of provender—eggs and rashers of bacon, and bread and butter, and quince preserve, and doughnuts and layer cake, and pies and coffee and potatoes, and a big iron "spider," and a big tin coffeepot. Oh,

and some tin pie plates and some tinny knives and forks. How we enjoyed that banquet when it was finally cooked over the red-hot little stove. How Harding was suddenly discovered to be a better coffee maker than actor! How Aimée Marinez herself fried eggs to an epicurean turn, and how we all devoured Mrs. Abijah Jerkins' doughnuts! I never liked my companions so well as that snow-picnic day.

I liked them pretty well one night when we were playing a three-day engagement in Racoon City. We were all staying in the one hotel the place boasted as comfortable, and opposite Bessie Greer and me at the long table sat three young men, whom I took to be drummers, offering the merchants of Racoon City the season's novelties in suspenders, smoking apparatus, and woolen underwear. To these young men, a "show girl was a show girl," and they made remarks intended for our ears, they ogled us, and they made themselves generally odious. Bessie was for putting them in their place, as she put it, by a high-pitched reference to the manners of gentlemen and those of counter jumpers, and the difference between the two. I managed to keep her quiet, however, and adopted my own style of magnificently ignoring them and their ways.

The first night when we went into the room we shared we found a large box of flowers. There was no card.

"It's those Johnnies at the table," said Bessie. "They can't be so bad, after all. I guess they heard what I said about gentlemen—that time you trod on my foot so, Polly—and these are an apology."

"Maybe so," said I skeptically. Then I looked at the box cover. The flowers were addressed to me. Bessie discovered this at the same time.

"Huh!" she observed. Then she cheered up. "They got our names mixed, I guess. Or else they think because you're quieter and older looking that you are running me—sort of chaperoning me."

I forbore to reply to this, but, as the flowers were in my name, I placed them

outside the door of our room, together with two pairs of boots, a waste-paper basket full of scraps, and two empty ginger-ale bottles. Bessie protested volubly against this advertisement of the fact that we regarded the flowers as so much trash, but I had my way. The next afternoon, another box of the roses, and a scrawl on a card.

If you will go to supper with us after the performance, please wear one in your hair, the first act. Third row orchestra, third seat
P. S.—If your friend will go, ask her please to wear one.

I stated the situation to my friend, and to all my friends of the company. We numbered eleven. We all went on with a red rose conspicuously attached to our heads—men and women alike. We cast a meaning glance at the designated seats. By the end of the first act they were empty!

"Cheap sports!" commented Harding that night. "To let the sight of eleven ravenous guests frighten them off from their supper party!"

All this time I was understudying Aimée Marinez in the leading rôle. I never wished for anything so much as for a chance to play it. It did not seem to me much of a part, compared with those in which I had always imagined myself—but it was a good deal better than the stay-at-home-and-darn-the-socks aunt, with her half-dozen sentences. And I did want to prove to our manager, and through him to Ferret and Greenfelt, at home—I thought of New York now as "home," and Broadway as the one thoroughfare—that I could play a large part as well as any one.

But Miss Marinez never gave me my longed-for chance. She was strong as an ox, and she conserved her strength by the most careful attentions. No automobile in which she rode ever broke down twenty miles from the stage door; her foot never turned on a vagrant peel. She never indulged herself in the caprices of spoiled stars, and delivered ultimatums to the effect that she wouldn't play if her dressing room at Oshkosh were not hung with pink brocade, or if the leading man



We all went on with a red rose conspicuously attached to our heads.

did not let her take the second-act curtain call alone. The truth was that she was as determined to be a success upon the stage as ever I had been. She had no great talent, but she had tremendous perseverance. She owed her start, so it was said in the company, to the partiality of a New York banker, who, in consideration of her acceptance as a leading woman, was reported to have backed one of Greenfelt's projects. Even with that sponsorship, she had not received what her heart greatly craved—a long New York season, or a good position in any company playing a long New York engagement.

Well—that was all that there was to my first season. I acquired familiarity with the actual stage. I no longer had palpitation of the heart in the wings over the thought of going on. I was moderately sure that my voice would carry as far as necessary. I grew to know the members of the company on easy enough terms. I craved, for the most part, to study the rôles on which I had fed my young ambition and imagination. Of what use was it to know by heart the lines of Shake-

speare's heroines when one will probably never recite one of them? I used to read Bessie Greer's scrapbook of slender little notices from provincial newspapers, instead of Sheridan and Sardou, nowadays. In short, I had not been actually in the profession for a season before I ceased to try to improve my mind. I know it isn't a noble record. It only happens to be a true one.

As I have suggested, I dropped into many lax ways, and did not hold myself rigidly to the high ideals of conduct by which I felt quite sure that all other women should guide their lives. Being human, and a companion-craving sort of human at that, I could not say to my associates:

"Go to; you will not do for me. Sir Galahad and the Chevalier Bayard are my manly ideals; you, gentlemen, do not ever so remotely resemble them; therefore, spare me your conversation. Ladies, St. Elizabeth of Hungary and Isabella d'Este are about what I think women should be—either self-abnegating angels, or brilliant achievers of brilliant results. You are as unlike

these characters as it is possible for women to be, so I will be obliged to you if you will second my efforts to make the stage our only meeting place."

No, I could not say these things. And I didn't want to. I preferred to "chum" with Bessie Greer, and thus to save a little money, and insure a little companionship. I preferred to stifle my resentment when Outcault, our heavy villain, patted me on the shoulder in passing, rather than to take him to task and lay myself open to the charge of priggishness. In later years, I have learned how, without too great a pothor, to repress undue familiarity. But then I tolerated it, to a

degree, because I had neither the poise nor the courage to resent it properly.

And I caught several colds, what with chilly trains and draughty dressing rooms. And I grew jealous of other women's chances, and critical of their dramatic gifts. And when our season closed in May I had something like a hundred and fifty dollars to live on until I obtained a new engagement, and to repay the extra fifty which my father had sent me, and to replenish my personal wardrobe now, and my professional one later.

It was a magnificent showing! I went home to Windy River for a little rest, and I felt abashed at the thought of Melissa and Agatha!

IV.

Almost all aspirants for stage honors think that their troubles will be past once they have succeeded in securing a foothold on the theatrical ladder. Never was there a greater delusion. With exceptional talent, exceptional beauty, exceptional prestige or backing, a girl can "get on" from the first. Without one of them, she is hardly much better off at the end of her first season than at the beginning. The world is full of averagely good actresses, who spend half their time in looking for engagements, pass half their seasons in embitteredly surveying the acting of other women, and thinking how much better they could do the thing themselves. Some of them haven't the gift that carries a pleasant personality across the footlights; some of them haven't a pleasant personality; they are too exigent, without having the immense popularity which exigence needs to be anything than plain cantankerousness. Some of them are fretful, fault-finding—the kind of women whom a manager would rather run a mile than talk to for half an hour. In no other business in the world does hard work—unaccompanied by brilliant success—count for so little.

Each year there is a new crop of youth, good looks, self-assurance, enthusiasm, crowding the market, only

too ready to snatch at the chances the woman of some experience accepts without gratitude, without interest. Youth thinks the trivial little part a step; experience sometimes knows it for the journey's end. If one is a fairly good stenographer, one need not fear fresh rivals for one's position every year. Not so with the "fairly good" actress.

Well, the end of my first season did not find me as wise in all these affairs as the end of my twelfth. I was impatient to get back to Broadway, to seize any opportunity that might offer among the dingy offices where the men sat and smoked, and measured one with cold, appraising eyes, and spoke with overfamiliarity, or with curttness and scorn. I hadn't been in Windy River two weeks before I was "on edge" with nerves. The family had welcomed me with much sweetness and affection, but their interests were not exclusively theatrical. Names that meant everything to me were unknown to them. Henry Irving they had heard of, but not James Harding or Greenfelt's man Ferret. Because they occasionally wished to tell me the news of my old friends and neighbors, I thought them very provincial and narrow in their interests. I did not realize what a monument of provincialism I

myself was—and almost every actor of my acquaintance is, also. Limited interests! Never were horizons so bounded as those of the stage folk, with a very few shining exceptions.

My old friend Deering White gave me a wholesome eye-opener that visit. He looked disapprovingly upon me—even my vanity could see that I was rather proud of my easy, assured manner, of my touch-and-go style of conversation—though, to tell the truth, I was much more mistress of it in Windy River than I had been on the road. He said to me one day:

"I'm disappointed in you, Polly. I thought you were well enough grounded in the proper kind of life, the proper, everyday kind of manners, not to have picked up—I don't know exactly what it is; but it's the sort of wash that a cheap actress is dipped in; it's a sort of glaze—of knowingness, of flipness—it's bravado—and a lack of interest in the rest of the world, and an ignorant, open contempt for the rest of the world's interests."

My face was hot, and so was my heart—with wrath. I had no neat retort ready, but I refused to see him again while I was at home. I have learned since that in nothing could I have shown myself more the "cheap" actress he had called me than in that performance, that hot resentment of any criticism, that willingness to forget favors because they were not followed by flattery. Nevertheless, Deering's words rankled to some purpose. I sat down with myself for an hour—after I had sufficiently recovered my rage—and held a little session of self-examination. And I concluded that it was not enough to avoid the grosser forms of folly and dissipation, for which the profession offered so many opportunities; that one must have a finer rule of conduct than that; in short, that one could not be a fine woman on the stage except by the exercise of those very traits which make fine women everywhere—unselfishness, kindness, breadth of interests, appreciations of other things than the stage, and appreciations of what was best in that.

I took to studying again, and I sat down humbly with Melissa and forced myself to be interested in the normal cooking courses; and I helped revise mother's wardrobe, and I listened docilely while father told us what was the exact matter with the country. Though I steadfastly refused to see Deering White again, and though I felt that I hated him, yet he did a good thing for my family—and for me—when he pointed out to me whither I was tending.

July found me back on Broadway, looking for an engagement, resolutely repressing my swagger, sternly forbidding myself to toss my head, firmly refusing to exchange badinage of a scintillating nature with the various officials with whom I came in contact. I think that my abstinence in these respects cost me something in popularity, and may have cost me something in work and salary. But I went home each unsuccessful day, saying bitterly to the critic whom I had set up in my mind, and who bore the familiar features of my old childhood's friend: "Well, there was nothing cheap about me to-day, I think?"

There wasn't—and there wasn't anything very successful. On the stage, one needs to be a Duse before one can adopt a touch-me-not pose.

Eventually, I found a place that season, also. It was a small part in a secondary company which was going to play, on the road, one of the big New York successes of the preceding season. I was to receive thirty dollars a week, and I felt that riches were now mine. I had as many as twelve sentences to speak, and I thought that my renown would ring from shore to shore. But, alas, when it was found by the leading woman that two of those twelve sentences brought me a laugh on the opening night, they were promptly excised. And as I had to dress for the part of a young lady in society, wearing a dinner gown in one act, a sumptuous negligée in another, a tailored walking suit and furs in the third, and a dancing frock in the fourth, the thirty dollars a week did not reach so much

farther than the twenty had reached last season. The play was known as a clothes drama, and one of its chief attractions was supposed to be the interest its elegant dressing aroused in the hearts of the feminine spectators. The announcement on the programme, "Costumes by Madame O'Connor," reduced my staggering bill of three hundred dollars to one hundred and fifty dollars.

I was the leading woman's understudy again, and as this one—Charlotte French, let us call her—made Aimée Marínez seem an angel of self-effacing modesty and sweetness, by her attitude toward the company, there seemed little chance of my ever having a chance to play the leading rôle. But I did—and I partly blush and partly laugh to think how it came about.

About the middle of the winter we were to play a week's engagement in Windy River. The traveling this season, by the way, had been much less laborious than that of the preceding year; we made a good many of the large cities on the middle Western circuit, where we played from three nights to a week, and we were going to the Northwest to play a series of week engagements. Well, at Windy River we happened to be booked for a week. I stayed at home, of course, and mother's club gave a reception one non-matinée afternoon for Charlotte French and me and the other ladies of the company, and Melissa gave a luncheon, or breakfast; and the city, or that part of it in which I had moved, was complementarily excited over me.

It occurred to Gus Schreiner, our manager, that it would be a graceful act, and perhaps not a bad stroke of business as well, to give me a chance at the leading rôle one night. He broached the subject to Miss French. "Ye gods, what a scorching she gave me!" he reported to me afterward. "It's no go this time. Charlotte will—see us farther first."

I thanked Gus for his effort in my behalf, but told him that I could have spared him the trouble of making it had I known what he was going to

do. And the nights went on, with Charlotte fairly snapping my ten remaining speeches out of my mouth.

Came Friday. I was brooding over the fact that Miss French had shown a disposition to annex Deering White, with whom, this trip, I was on terms of distant politeness. I heard from some of the others that he had written a play. I heard Charlotte tell him at the reception, where he figured as a little lion—literary lions are few in Windy City—that she would so love to see it; and Deering was enough of a budding playwright to look very pleased, and to ask her if he might send her a copy of it. He might bring it to her, she said; and it seemed to me positively silly to see a grown man so set up by a trifle of that sort.

Well, as I say, Friday came. I got down to the theatre a little before seven, and sat in the dressing room talking to the women who shared it with me. At seven, there was the usual bustle, and conspicuous in the medley of sounds was a loud demand for Miss French. But Miss French was not there. Telephoning to the hotel elicited the information that Miss French had gone out about four o'clock in an automobile with Mr. Deering White, and had not returned. Mr. White's house and office reported him absent.

"You'd better be ready to take the part if she don't get in," said Gus Schreiner to me, and the girl who understudied my part flushed with eagerness and hope.

"It's no use, Kitty," I told her. "Our friend Lottie will be here in time to take her part if she breaks twenty machines to do it."

But the minutes passed, and she didn't come. I got into her first-act frock, with the conviction that I would have my trouble for my pains, and that the curtain would rise, a few minutes late, to be sure, but with Miss Charlotte French in her own part. But I was mistaken. By and by, I found myself taking her cue and walking out on the stage in Windy River, in the leading part.

There was a muffled beating in my ears. There was a suffocating sense across my chest; in the bottom of my mind there was the firm conviction that Charlotte French would dash upon the stage in a few seconds, and, tearing the costume from my back, resume the part. But, somehow, I spoke—and the beating in my ears stopped at the sound of my own voice, the weight lifted from my chest, the panic-stricken dread of Miss French vanished. I felt joyously mistress of the situation. I even remembered all the things I had thought she did badly in the part—and I went triumphantly through it.

Charlotte was immensely unpopular in the company. That, rather than any native kindness in Gus Schreiner, had made him anxious for me to play the lead; that, rather than love for me, made the company crowd around me with warm words of congratulation after I came off.

"Not so worse," observed Mr. Schreiner jocularly.

At twenty minutes before eleven an automobile towed Deering White and the enraged leading woman in their disabled machine up to the hotel. She said afterward that she could not quite understand why Mr. White had taken her out on so unfrequented a road that, after their accident, they had to wait two hours before another car passed. He explained the difficulty of reading a play on a crowded boulevard.

I suspected something, but I wasn't sure for five years. Then Gus Schreiner told me.

"You owe a lot to Deering White," he said. "Remember that night out in Windy River? That was his scheme, when we found out that the French wouldn't give you a chance. Poor old French—she's had nothing but failures since that year!"

I felt sympathetic with Charlotte now—I had had one or two failures to my own account. Not personal failures, you understand. No actress ever has those! But ill-advised managers have taken poor plays; playwrights have written, blindly and stupidly, plays that the public didn't want; the public has

dotingly given its imbecile support to worthless things; and *therefore* I have a few failures to my score.

Seldom have I had a leading part in the failures. I am not made of the leading woman material, I am afraid. I have a reputation for conscientious work, for intelligence, for utter reliability—and that's all the good it does me. No dramatist is engaged in writing leading rôles for a lady whose best traits are those which would answer equally well if she were matron of an orphan asylum or teacher of a public school.

I am better looking than I was twelve years ago, despite the added age; I know better how to bear myself, how to dress myself, how to bring out my good points, how to subordinate my bad ones. But, even so, I am not a raving beauty, nor has my face the tragic or the piquant charm that sometimes makes up for lack of perfect features. I'm just an ordinarily handsome woman, rather more graceful than some; and the woods are full of us, and in the possession of these attributes there is no assurance of theatrical success. I'm considered a good actress for a subordinate part in a good company, or a better part in a worse company. It is understood that I am not going to set the dramatic Thames on fire; but, then, neither am I going to set the company by the ears because of my temperamental peculiarities.

As a matter of fact, I know that I have a better stage presence than lots of the women who make big-headline successes. I know that my voice is better than most of those used on the stage to-day—for I have labored with that voice. I know that I have a good brain, and am capable of extracting all that there is in a part—that is, in the kind of a part which I am likely to have. I am not so sure as I was fifteen years ago that I could get out everything there is in *Lady Macbeth*, or that I could play *Hedda Gabler* with complete understanding of that morbid nature.

I think, perhaps, if there were an old-time stock company, with an old-

time manager, who was artist and actor and dictator, I might be brought to a high degree of perfection in my own style. I think if the dramatists of the present day would write, or if the managers would produce, or if the public would support, a school of really polite and witty comedy, that I might shine in it. But the managers are business men to-day instead of artist-dictators; they cannot train me to a pitch of perfection in my own line. And practical playwrights are writing pieces for "stars," not comedies for well-drilled companies. And the public is supporting musical farce and melodrama, refined or unrefined.

That I happen to have escaped a good deal of the insults which we are sometimes informed are a feature of the stage life of women, is neither here nor there. I know successful actresses who are well-bred and virtuous women; I know well-bred and virtuous women who are mighty poor actresses; and reckless, daring, convention-smashing women who are good actresses, and others again who smash quite as many conventions, and can't act at all.

The answer to all that question lies back of any actress' present, in her home training, and in her inheritance. That women who have not had careful bringing-up, who are not well grounded in good principles, or who inherit a taste for the unconventional, find the stage life one of many temptations cannot be denied. But I dare say the same women could find opportunity for indiscretion in teaching in a high school or nursing in a hospital.

I've had my one or two love affairs, of course. I should have had them if

I had been a woman in society or a clerk in a department store or a fruit peddler. They have no more to do with the stage than the marriage of the clergyman's daughter to the missionary, after she has jilted the curate, has to do with religious matters.

Taking good seasons and bad together, I have been employed on an average of twenty-five weeks a year; my salaries have averaged thirty-five dollars a week, occasionally rising to sixty, and sometimes, when I have been desperately in need of work, sinking to the old twenty again. It will thus be seen that I have earned in the twelve years I have been on the stage eight thousand four hundred dollars; a stenographer, at fifteen dollars a week, working fifty weeks a year, would have earned nine thousand dollars in the same time and would have been under no such expenses for clothes, service, travel, and the like.

"But look at Kate Armistice," cry all the young girls who feel as I felt fifteen years ago. "Look at Maude Adams; look at Ethel Barrymore! They make three or four or five hundred dollars a week. They play for forty weeks, and then spend three months being entertained by the English aristocracy, or yachting with American millionaires, their intimate friends!"

True. There is no career so brilliantly satisfying as a popular actress', even if she does not reach quite this standard of favor. But there are two of Maude Adams and Ethel Barrymore, two of Margaret Anglin and Margaret Illington. And the stage statistics report that there are some six thousand of me.

THE END.





A Gift to Danske

By Margaret Belle Houston

IT is more blessed to give than to receive," I quoted, rubbing my hands over the blaze.

"It is certainly less objectionable," agreed the old bachelor gruffly, removing his feet from the fender.

I laid off my wraps slowly.

"I wish, Dabney," I said, "that you could have seen Danske's face when I gave her the book you sent her. It was just what——"

The bachelor's rugged profile developed suddenly into a full countenance, wearing a dazed frown. "The book I——"

"The book you sent her. It was a beauty, too. And little Tom——"

"But I sent no book. You know very well I don't believe in this indiscriminate giving of Christmas presents. It's against my principles. If people——"

"Of course it is, Dabney, dear. I know very well," I rejoined amiably. "So I got them myself. You'll get the bill all in good time."

"I've no doubt I shall. And what, may I ask——"

The old bachelor is my brother. Danske is my husband's niece. She is a bit afraid of Dabney—is Danske. Tom is her small brother. I had taken Tom a pair of ice skates from the same awe-inspiring source.

"Of all the——" Dabney began once more. He had made several very promising beginnings, but I was singing lightly as I moved about the room, hanging a holly wreath here and a mistletoe

bell there and screwing little brass hooks into their old holes in the mantelpiece for, mind you, that is where the babies' stockings hang each Christmas. So, when I came to the third hook, there being no hole for it—it was a new stocking and quite tiny—Dabney must needs shuffle out of his chair and apply a strong masculine thumb and finger to the task.

"And Tom—his face beamed. I am glad I took your things over early. He will have all day to skate. There are only so many days in the year, Dabney. And not all of those are ice days. And Danske said—by the way, Dabney, you should see Danske."

Dabney muttered.

"And what do you think she said? You can't guess. She said: 'I've such stacks of Gibson books, such piles of candy—but *this!*' And she hugged it quite close." I felt sure that this picture of such arms as Danske's hugging anything close would reach even Dabney's gnarly-crustured heart.

"Hmm!" remarked Dabney, placing his feet on the fender. "What was it?"

"The book? Oh, 'Aurora Leigh.' Mrs. Browning, you know—beautifully bound."

"Hmm! Well, that does very well. I'd no idea she was so precocious. How old is she now—fifteen?"

Now, I knew he hadn't looked at Danske in the last ten years, but I sat down on the footstool with a reproach-

ful plump and gazed in his face. "Danske is twenty, Dabney. And she will be here to-night for dinner. That is why I warned you. When she thanks you, you will at least understand. And you sent her mother a scarf—the sweetest shade of lilac. You have wonderful taste, Dabney, dear. It melted the heart within me." He was quite meek now. "You see the Martyns have been nice to you—growly as you are. And it's time you showed you cared."

"But I don't care." The storm was reverberating faintly, as it went over the hill. "I never go to their rosebud soirées or whatever they are."

••• "That's your own fault. And Danske confided in me to-day, that, surprising as it might seem, you alone understood her."

"Understood her! Well, I'll be hanged!" It was the faint farewell thunder peal. He took his feet from the fender and wiped his brow.

The Martyns came that evening. Danske went straight to Dabney's side. There was a trace of shyness in her manner still, but I think the new knowledge of his deep understanding sustained her. She held out a slim little hand, and looked up at him.

Danske has brown eyes, long-lashed, wistful. Danske has a tender red mouth, and a demure little chin with a dimple in it. Very dark is Danske's hair, and to-night it waved back softly from her brow and gathered its shadows into a cluster of little rings and curls low on her neck. Danske was all in white. Even the angel on the tip-top of the Christmas tree was not more angelic than Danske.

"I want to thank you——" she began, and I lost the rest amid the yells of Dotty and Jack Junior, who had just been uncaged into the living room.

But I saw Dabney bend smiling from his six-foot eminence and take the hand. It looked as if he were saying: "Don't mention it, Miss Danske." Then they went out and sat on the landing of the stairway, Dabney laughing as happily as if he had never spent his leisure

reading Kant and wearing his feet on the fender. And Dabney had never abandoned the children before. It had always delighted him to watch them dance about the Christmas tree. And Danske, too, for that matter. Only the Christmas before she had taught them games.

But that wasn't all. Only three months later—I remember, for on the twenty-seventh of March I put Bunny in short dresses, and it was just two days before this—Dabney sat brooding in the living room. I had seen but little of Dabney these last three months. The bank had been tiding a crisis, and Jack, too, had worked long and late.

After a few days of sunshine a cold spring rain had begun, and a fire was brooding in the grate. I stirred it, and it woke joyously, sending up myriad sparks and a bright, leaping flame. Dabney woke, too.

"Do you know," he said, "I thought it was rather a shame about that book."

Gradually it stole over me that he was thinking about the book he'd sent Danske. So I nodded comprehendingly, bracing myself for another sermon on the indiscriminate giving of presents.

"I never read that book," he went on in an aggrieved tone. "Not then, though I have since. And that little girl thinks I gave it to her because I understood her. Whereas it wasn't I at all."

I nodded again.

"Now, I don't like to—to sail under false colors, as it were; it makes a man uncomfortable, though you may not suspect it. So, to set myself right—to sort of square myself with Danske, I went down and got her a present myself."

He had taken it from his pocket, and he smiled now as he unwrapped it, his big fingers shaking a little. And when he opened the box I understood that the chief crisis in Dabney's life just then had not been connected with the bank.

It was a ring. A solitary diamond.

THE TROUBLED EYES.

(A CHRISTMAS STORY)

BY

WM. HAMILTON OSBORNE.



ILLUSTRATED BY J. A. LEMON

COWEN, the senior member of the firm of Cowen, Covington & Black, counselors at law, glanced gravely toward the girl. The girl shrank into her corner, and clutched the child upon her lap nervously about the shoulders. She shivered, and drew herself together, not under the influence of any overpowering emotion, but because of the immediate presence of unfamiliar formalities of the law.

"You fully understand what I have read?" he queried. She nodded, but he went on. "You appreciate the fact fully, do you, that the giving up of your little girl means a full and unqualified surrender? I want you to understand that. I want you to *realize* that." He said this incisively, with unwonted emphasis, for the girl's indifference had been, so far, appalling—appalling, not only to himself, but also to the two middle-aged persons who sat across the table, the woman with the lorgnette, the man with the fur-lined overcoat.

"It means," went on Cowen, "that you and your child must separate now—forever. Consider carefully." He rolled the words out unctuously, even melodramatically, as was his wont. But the girl in the corner only tapped the pink bow on the shoulder of the child,

and glanced listlessly out of the window.

"I understand. *I'm* willing," she returned. The mother tone was lacking from her voice. Her face was pale. She was slender, tired, worn out. The beauty that once had been there was almost starved out of her young face. She kept tapping the pink bow on the child's shoulder, but she did not look at the child. Her glance wandered nervously to and fro, between the window, that shut out the outer cold, and the neat packet of yellow-backed bills that reposed upon the desk of Cowen. She pulled off the tattered remnant of a glove.

"I heard you read it. I understood it, every word," she said again.

She rose, and deposited the child upon the chair. She started toward the desk. The woman with the lorgnette on the other side of the desk sprang from her chair, ran to the child, and encircled it with her arm, drawing the little face down against the soft mink fur of her cloak.

"You little dear!" she murmured.

The child submitted easily to the embrace, but her eyes followed her mother, standing at the desk. Her mother seized the proffered pen.

"Tell me where to sign," she said. Cowen showed her, and she started in,

but paused. "You haven't told me—you didn't read me their names," she interposed.

At the pertinent suggestion, the man of the fur coat glanced sharply at the girl, and the woman stopped abruptly her caressing of the child. Cowen alone was unmoved.

"Right," he answered, "and there was method in my failure to reveal the identity of the future foster parents of your child. In response to your request, I ask a question." His eyes searched the face of the girl, searched her soul, for aught she knew. "Are you acting in good faith? Do you mean to leave the child alone? Do you promise *never* to see her, never to attempt to see her? Are you *sure*?"

There was no hesitation. She nodded swiftly. "Surely," she replied. "Only I thought I'd like to know."

Cowen became quite frank. "If you knew the names of these people, their addresses, my dear young woman, one thing, and only one, would happen. Just as soon as this roll of bills had disappeared, you would be back again for one of two things—the child or more money. It would be useless, but it would be annoying. I want to be fair. My clients, no matter where they come from, no matter who they are, are people of standing, of wealth, of refinement. They are people who will give this child the home she ought to have. If you are acting in good faith, then further particulars are quite superfluous, it seems to me."

He seized the packet of bills and toyed lightly with it. The girl's eyes fastened themselves upon the bills—and in her eyes there glowed the light of triumph; more than that, the light in the eyes of a starving man, who sits down to meat and drink; the light in the eyes of adversity when sudden prosperity is thrust upon it.

"I'm satisfied," she said.

Cowen placed a chair for her at the desk. "Sign on this line," he commanded, "your full name—Sarah J. Greene."

"Mrs. Sarah J. Greene?" she queried.

He shook his head. "Just plain Sarah," he replied. She followed his instructions, and laid down the pen.

"Perhaps," exclaimed Cowen, holding up his hand, "you'd better sign both names—your stage name, also. If you please."

"Letty Lonsdale," murmured the young mother, suiting the action to the word. She rose once more, looked at Cowen, at Cowen's two clients, at the child, and at the roll of bills. "Now, I suppose," she faltered, "that I can go?"

Cowen held the bills in his left and shook hands with his right hand. "You can go," he repeated, "and, believe me, you've done the best that could be done for the little girl. I know Mr. and Mrs.—er—X., and I can assure you that the child's life from now on will be a happy one. Here, this is yours, my dear."

The girl clutched the bills, crossed to the child, and stooped, still listlessly, and kissed her. "Good-by, little kiddie," she whispered audibly. It was a term of endearment, but there was no warmth in it—no love—no agony. The woman with the lorgnette winced at the coldness of it. But Sarah J. Greene, otherwise Letty Lonsdale, as the footlights knew her, or had known her, turned her back abruptly upon the woman and the child, and stalked toward the door.

"Good-by to everybody," she exclaimed.

At the door she stopped for one long, harrowing moment, and turned and swept the room and its occupants carefully with a thoughtful, calculating glance. The woman with the lorgnette did not breathe, for in that one moment of suspense rested the possibility that Letty Lonsdale might immediately undo all that had been done that day. But Letty Lonsdale, still clutching the bills, the color sweeping back into her face, jerked her head decisively.

"It's all right," she finally announced. "Good-by." She went.

The woman with the lorgnette sprang across the room, and clutched Cowen by the arm.

"Lock the door, lock the door, Mr. Cowen," she exclaimed wildly. "Don't let her back! Don't let her back! I want to be sure, sure. *Please* lock the door."

Cowen did as he was bid. But there was no need. Letty Lonsdale never tapped again for admission. She passed at that instant, apparently, out of the lives of the four people in the room, including little Letty, in the corner. Little Letty's chin quivered, at the excitement more than at anything else, and the lady of the lorgnette hastily returned to the child, and once more caressed her.

"Almost Christmas," she crooned, in her motherly way. "And Christmas trees, and candy canes, dolls, turkey."

The child's eyes brightened. "What's turkey?" she returned.

Cowen cleared his throat. He placed the agreement in an envelope, and picked up another piece of paper. "I have taken the pains," he announced, "of getting a certified copy of the marriage record relating to this child's parents. It might be of value to the infant to know, at some future period, that upon her was the stamp of full respectability. I think you'd better keep it with the papers."

"You're sure they *were* married, then?" asked the lady.

Cowen nodded, as a matter of course. "Oh, yes," he answered. "This girl's husband was no good, that's all. Beat her, and dragged her down into the gutter. He's dead now. He was a nonentity. And she's about as unimportant. But she's respectable, all right. I've got her record here."

"Tell me," exclaimed the gentleman in the fur coat, "is this thing binding?"

Cowen shook his head. "Only morally," he answered. "A mother cannot barter away her child. But—here is the point. If she ever makes an application to the court for its custody, the court has the say, not she; and, under the circumstances—legal adoption, and all that; fine home, prosperous people—it won't disturb the situation. You can rest assured of that.

But"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you need have no fear. She doesn't care. She never will care. She's that kind."

Five minutes later, Cowen was pocketing *his* check for two hundred and fifty, and the two comfortable clients and their diminutive ward were seated comfortably in their limousine, bound first for a restaurant and an attractive meal; second, for the stores and the glitter of holiday lights; and,



"Mademoiselle Letty. The same as *affer*."

third, for home—home, a soft, warm, comfortable home. Little Letty's eyes glittered as they forged along the streets; the eyes of her new mother burned with affection. The lady grasped her husband by the arm.

"Some one to love us," she murmured, the tears starting from her eyes.

Her husband gripped the handle of the door.

"Some one to love us," he repeated grimly. "Yes. The only thing in life worth while to us. Some one to love us. She *must* love us." Something thickened in his throat. "We've had a child," he went on painfully. "We *have* a child of our own. But until

now we've never had anybody to love us." He picked the child up and sat her on his knee. "Look," he exclaimed, pointing toward the corner of a street, "see the Santa Claus."

The child laughed at the familiar sight. She was accustomed to things upon the street. But she stroked the collar of his coat.

"What's turkey?" she persisted.

Cold as it was, Letty Lonsdale, otherwise Mrs. Sarah J. Greene, felt that her heart was driving her blood to the surface and keeping her warm. She knew that her face was flushed with feverish excitement. She sought the crowded part of town. Heretofore the Christmas crowds had left only an aching void within her. But now the spirit of the holiday was upon her.

"A thousand dollars," she whispered happily to herself; "a cool, clean thousand dollars."

Good nature, new life surged over her. She was buffeted by winds, jostled by people, but her soul was throbbing out a psalm of life, of hope, of happiness.

"First thing is clothes," she told herself. Only outer clothes—shoes, coat, hat, gloves. The rest could wait until after dinner, the glorious dinner that was waiting for her up at Raphael's, though Raphael didn't know it, and the dinner didn't, either. She entered the Green Store, and pushed her way to the fur-coat department. She knew just what she wanted. There was never any doubt in her mind as to that. Year after year, day after day, in her adversity, she had held her thoughts to the passing show; instinctively, she knew clothes for what they were.

"Something in fur, and long, and stylish," she told the attendant.

She got what she wanted in the coat line, in the hat line, in the glove line, and in the boot line. And when, outwardly attired, she stood before the cheval glass in the store, she was startled out of her senses. Beauty shone from her—the old, lustrous, winsome beauty of the Letty Lonsdale of four short years before.

"You wouldn't know me for the same, would you?" she queried of the salesgirl.

She paid for her purchases, took a cab, and drove to Raphael's, entered gayly, and tapped Julius, head waiter, lightly on the shoulder—not the thing to do, she well understood, but she couldn't help it. Life was irrepressible within her.

"Hello, Julius," she exclaimed rapturously.

Julius turned swiftly, deferentially. And then, unbending, he thrust forth his hand.

"Ai—ee," he ejaculated, "the Miss Lonsdale. Mademoiselle Letty. The same as effer, also."

Later, he came over to her table and indulged in a brief, but confidential, talk.

"Married? They said you were?" he insinuated.

Letty sighed, and took a bite of lobster cutlet. "Yes," she answered; "he died."

"Ah," went on Julius, the gossip. "Any leetle ones?"

Letty drew her breath sharply. She glanced across the broad expanse that belonged to Raphael, and then her eyes returned to those of Julius.

"No children, Julius," she answered, delving into a cold paté, made of grouse and truffles; "no children. It isn't fashionable nowadays."

She laughed, and Julius laughed with her. The old sparkle was in her eyes, the old color in her face.

"A young widow," smiled Julius. "A merry widow, eh?"

Archly, she returned his glance. "A very merry widow, Julius," she returned, "for I'm going back—back upon the stage. I'm free—free—free!"

She burst forth once again in laughter; and, as suddenly, she stopped. A strange, troubled, dissatisfied expression crossed her countenance. She was warm, she was clothed, her hunger was appeased. Life was coming back into her veins.

And, yet, there was something—something amiss.

"Ah," thought Julius, to himself, as

he softly stole back to his post of duty, "she thinks now of the past—the past, not so pleasant as the future. Ah, but it is good to see her back again."

She handed him a Christmas present of a dollar as she left.

The girl next to Letty Lonsdale in the pony ballet nudged her sharply.

"Ninny," she exclaimed, in a whisper, "he's the last man in the front row. Look at him. He's been here three—no, four—nights running, now."

Letty Lonsdale looked, listlessly enough. And, yet, that first glance startled her. For the youth in the last row—he still was a youth—was gazing persistently upon her, into her eyes. Some curious thrill seized her; the man's glance was so earnest, so appealing. Letty caught her breath sharply, for there was something in it all that made her feel as though a childish hand were clutching at her heart. She was moved, strangely affected. She could not tear her eyes from the eyes that held hers; at least, for an appreciable space of time. But, suddenly, she was swung with the rest of the line sharply toward the right, and her movement left the stranger out of the account. When again she faced across the lights, she evaded his glance, but looked straight out over the heads of the audience, straight into unfathomed vistas; and upon her once again was that strange, inscrutable wistfulness that somehow distinguished her from every other member of the ballet.

"Look at the girl in the middle," women would exclaim to their escorts. "Isn't she simply stunning?"

Letty Lonsdale felt the admiration of the crowd eating into her consciousness. She felt that she *was* simply stunning. She knew that once more she had come into her own. But she didn't know why the crowd across the footlights gaped at her beauty. She didn't know why the youth in the first row so insistently and persistently sought and caught her glance.

The next night he was there again. "It's about time you woke up," Letty's

companion said to her. "He's yours for the asking, and no mistake."

That night, as she wormed her way out through the narrow passage, Letty was stopped by a man she knew.

"Letty," he exclaimed, with a bit of formality tingeing his familiar, careless tone, "there's somebody who wants to meet you, and I have offered to—Miss Lonsdale, Mr. Benedict. Mr. J. Arthur Benedict, or Joe Benedict, as the town knows him. Miss Letty Lonsdale. Know each other. Make up and be friends."

Letty turned swiftly toward J. Arthur Benedict, and held out her hand impersonally. Then she drew back. "Oh," she exclaimed, in a choking voice. "You—you're the first-row man. I——"

There was a pause, during which Benedict flushed to the roots of his hair, and then turned pale as a ghost. Then Letty shot out her hand again, and took his.

"Awfully glad to meet you, Mr. Benedict," she said. She stopped a moment to permit her voice to regain its tone. "I'm going down to Raphael's to have a bite," she finally announced. "Will you two come with me if I pay the bill?"

J. Arthur Benedict came to the front handsomely. "If you'll pack as many of your friends in my machine as can squeeze in, and will let *me* pay the bill, I'll accept your invitation," he returned.

Miss Lonsdale's friends were not backward in coming forward, and they squeezed in, all right, and J. Arthur Benedict did as he had said—he paid the bill. He paid many other bills after that, at Raphael's, but these others were bills for only two, himself and Letty. He was in attendance at the Frivolity every week-day night, and always took her home.

It was upon one of these occasions that he stood with her late one night upon the moonlit steps of her boarding house. She had held out her hand to him, and he would not let it go.

"Letty," he whispered to her, "I want to know just what you think of me."



"All mine, and mine forever!"

From her vantage point above him, she looked down at his face, and smiled softly. He was a handsome youth, with a bit of recklessness in his manner that set him off well, and, possibly, a few evidences upon him of a free and careless way of living.

"I like you, Joe," she answered frankly.

He kissed her hand; she had taken off her gloves. "Do you know what I think of you, Letty?" he returned, "I love you. No," he went on hastily, as she drew her hand away, "you don't understand. You *can't* understand, girlie. I love you better than I love my life. I want—to marry you."

She eluded him, deftly opened the door, and disappeared within. "Good night," she called. And then she closed the door.

For a long while she stood before her mirror.

"Marry?" she exclaimed, shuddering. "Marry again?"

She glanced at her counterfeit presentment critically, coldly. She didn't wonder that Benedict wanted her. All her beauty had come back into her face; all the fullness and the grace into her

body. She possessed genuine magnetism, she was sure of that. And yet, marry!

"Oh," she told him the next time she saw him, "let us leave it all as it is. Let us go on. Yes, I love you, too. Let us go on loving—just this way—loving."

"No," he answered; "no. There will be no peace for me until you and I are one forever. You don't understand me now. This is something that has come over me—something stronger than I am, myself, this love. Listen, dear. Did you think it was you—well, your beauty that attracted me? Well, it was at first. But now the thing that has me in its grip is something that will not be denied. Can you guess what it is?"

She shook her head wonderingly. He went on. "What is it that you see over the heads of the people every night, Letty?" he queried. "What is there out there that you want? Tell me that."

She held her breath. "I don't know," she answered feebly, fearfully.

"Oh," he went on, clutching her arm, "it's that glance of wistfulness. What is it, trouble? I don't know what to call it—this trouble, this longing in your eyes. I think, perhaps, it may be your soul."

She stopped him. "I didn't know," she faltered, "that there was anything."

He held out his arms to her. "It's that glance of yours, Letty," he exclaimed, "that I want for myself. I want to meet it with my eyes. I don't know what it means, or what you long for, or what the trouble is. But I want to satisfy it. I want to give you what you want. I want you, wistfulness and all."

Letty stared at him for an instant. Then, suddenly, the darkness in her eyes deepened; her mouth softened; and full into the eyes of Benedict she shot the pathos of that wistfulness, the longing that he looked for. He caught her fiercely in his arms.

"You're mine, mine, mine!" he gasped. "All mine, and mine forever!"

"Yes," she breathed, "it was love that I wanted. I didn't know it. It was the love of somebody that I wanted. I've never had the love of a man. Not even of——" She stopped. "Once," she went on, "I had the love of a little child, but now—yes, you can have me, love and all. Ah, Joe," she wailed, "love me. Love me, never stop loving me! With all your heart and soul!"

There was no need of answer. The soul of a man in the glance of Benedict met the soul of a woman in the glance of Letty.

"Ah," he whispered rapturously, at length, "this is life. Once I thought that life was freedom, money, wine, song, women. But even women are not life. There is nothing worth while but love—yours for me, and mine for you. You and I, and love."

The next night he brought the ring to her; the best that money could buy. He brought an iron box with him. He brought bank books.

"I'm going to lay my cards upon the table," he told her gravely, "I'm rich in my own right. Nobody can get this stuff away from me now, and I'm not going to separate it from myself. It's yours and mine together. We're going to live the life with it—real life. You see!"

Letty saw the vistas that opened up before her. Her cup of happiness was full, and yet—— Again that glance of wistfulness and pain. But Benedict did not yield to that glorious opportunity. He rose to his feet.

"Letty," he said, "there are things in my career that I'm not proud of. I've been wild. There were crises, and entanglements, and—but it's all over. I tell you true. It's the first time I've ever loved anybody. Does the rest signify?"

She shook her head. She was beyond weighing chances now. This love eased the pain that throbbed and burned within her. No matter what happened, she could not cast this love away.

"That doesn't matter," she returned. "But I think I ought to tell you that I'm—a widow."

"I know," he nodded ecstatically. "They told me that. But I know you didn't love him. I'm sure of that."

"The trouble with me," she went on vaguely, "is that I never loved anybody until it was too late, too——"

"But not too late for me," he answered joyously, "and there's nobody but you and I."

"Nobody?" she answered, with a rising inflection. And across the vistas she heard, faintly, yet distinctly, the uncertain prattle of a child, the gentle tinkle of its glee, the pressure of a wee, small body against her breast, a warm, living thing that once had belonged to her.

"Oh," cried Benedict, watching her, "there it is again—your soul—your love." He crowded himself upon her, and strained her to his breast. After all, his love was worth while. It was good to be loved.

Finally, she released herself. She sobered. "What will your people say?" she queried uncertainly.

He flushed, and was silent for an instant. He shook his head. "I have no people," he returned. "I am alone in the world; free to do as I like; free, free!" There was an exultant ecstasy in his tone that brought her sharply back to that day when, she, too, was freed from the thralldom of adversity, when she had thrust into her bosom the packet of big bills, and had slunk through the Christmas crowds, rejoicing.

"There's nobody for me to consult," said Benedict joyously. "Is there anybody on your side that ought to know?"

In turn, she shook her head. "The rest is easy," he replied. "A word or two, then—Paradise and you."

Letty half hoped, half feared, as the months sped by, that this great love of theirs would bring to them a child. She was doomed to disappointment or relief, as the mood seized her. The time came when they both understood this fact. Her husband felt it the more keenly on her account.

"You were born to be a mother, I



His wife, Letty, was upon her knees, with the child in her arms.

think," he would tell her. "You could love a child."

They were driving in the park. "Wait," she said, holding up her hand.

Benedict drew rein alongside of a group of children who were playing on the lawn.

"I love to watch the kiddies," she exclaimed.

Benedict worried openly about the thing. But she only shook her head. "A child," she would say to him, "it's more than I deserve. I have enough, more than enough—you, and everything."

"Everything," he answered: "but what you want the most. Oh, I know, I've watched you. Perhaps," he would

suggest, "we might even think of adopting one."

She shuddered, as with fear. "No, no," she cried, "not that. I could love my own—my own, but not another's. And it wouldn't be right. It would be cruel, to separate one from her mother."

He still persisted. "We can find one who has no mother," he returned.

But she only shook her head. "I could love my own, my own," she would wail, with a depth of meaning that he could not understand. It puzzled him.

"How is it, Letty," he would laugh at times, "I don't feel this love of children that I haven't got, and yet you feel it? Why? Am I lacking in affection? You are a born mother, but I—"

"You are lacking in nothing, Joe," she answered gently, "but you cannot understand. Look there." She pointed with her finger at a slatternly woman, half drunk, who trailed along a path with a chubby boy following gayly at her heels.

"There!" said Benedict, with conviction. "Now what harm to separate that mother from that child, for instance? What good is she to him?"

But Letty clutched him in a frenzy. "No, no, no," she cried. "Don't talk about it. Don't talk about separating any mother from her child. It's a crime—a crime!"

Benedict blinked his eyes. "I wonder," he said slowly, gravely, "if mothers really feel half that you do—for their own children. Do they feel like that?"

"I should think they would," she answered.

Her husband blinked his eyes again. He drove on, thinking, thinking.

Months passed. Letty and her husband plunged full tilt into their second Christmas season, for they were gay; side by side, always side by side, they went the rounds of pleasure.

"The crowds," Letty would exclaim, "the Christmas crowds! How I love them. The street crowds, the store crowds, the mix-up—and the kiddies.

I wish I could buy things for all the kiddies in the world." She glanced out into space, with that wistful glance of hers. "I wish," she went on, "that now, just at Christmas time, all the children in the world could pass in front of me—all of them, wherever they lived."

Benedict laughed. "What good would that do you?" he asked.

She sighed. "So that I might pick out the one that I liked best," she answered. For within her a strong cry was gathering strength: "My Letty! My little Letty, where are you? Kiddie! Letty!"

An unanswered cry it was.

Three days before Christmas, Benedict came into her room one morning as she was dressing for breakfast. "Letty," he said, "there's something you've done for me, something you've taught me, something I've got to tell you. I never knew, before you showed me, how people felt toward their children." His voice thickened. "It's about my mother and my father that I've got to tell you. My Uncle Arthur left me my fortune; that was the beginning of it all. I came of age, and started out to go the pace. They kicked at home. I told you about the entanglements. They raised thunder about it all. And I left. That's all. I was pretty nasty about it, and too blamed independent. Well, I was still going downward when I met you. You did the rest. And you've taught me something that's driving me back. It's the Christmas season, girlie—good will and all that. I'm thinking of popping in on 'em, and making up. Since I *am* decent now. I had to tell you. I want you to come along."

Letty tapped him on the shoulder happily. "You're all right, Joe," she said, "and I guessed a whole lot of this before." A cloud crossed her brow. "But look at me. Don't the actress stick out all over me? And if I go along, do you think they'll want to kill the fatted calf when they find out that I'm Letty Lonsdale, late of the Frivolity? Hadn't you better go alone?"

"Not on your life," he answered.

"They gave me a chance, and I didn't take it. Now I'm going to give them a chance—to look me over and to look you over. And if they don't take the chance, why, I've done *my* duty. That's all I've got to say."

On Christmas eve, they bundled themselves into the machine. Benedict gave a few brief directions to the mechanic, and off they sped, up one street and down another, across a bridge, and through a wilderness of meadows, and brought up in the centre of the fashionable section of a Jersey town. Benedict leaped out, helped Letty up a set of broad stone steps, and pushed the button at the door. The door swung open.

"Mr. Benedict at home?" he queried.

Mr. Benedict was home, and so was Mrs. Benedict. "Tell them——" began Joe, and then he stopped and smiled. "Tell them that Miss Letty Lonsdale is here, and wants to see them. That'll keep 'em guessing," he remarked to Letty. "They'll come down, and——"

They entered a spacious drawing-room, and waited—waited. Finally, the same retainer entered once again. "Will Miss Lonsdale state her business?" he requested.

"Certainly," responded J. Arthur Benedict promptly. "Just tell them that Miss Lonsdale has called with reference to her claim against their son, J. Arthur. See if that doesn't fetch them down."

It did. Inside of two minutes a woman with a pale face and a man with a red face strode into the room. Arthur, their son, was posing dramatically under the centre light. The old man saw him first.

"Mother," he exclaimed, "it's our—it's—our boy, come back to us."

His mother gave a little cry, ran forward, and hugged him to her breast.

"Boy! Boy!" she cried. "Do you mean it? Is it for good?"

He disengaged himself for an instant. "Yes," he answered, "provided——" He stopped, and waved his hand toward Letty. "Let me introduce my—my wife."

The man and the woman turned hastily—and stopped—and stared. They knew they were confronted by a young woman of dazzling beauty. They knew something else.

"Why—why——" gasped Joe's mother, "this accounts for the message that came upstairs to us."

"Father—father," she exclaimed. "She—she's come back. She had no right—she had no right—she's come back to see."

Benedict, Senior, glanced at the young woman coldly. "Arthur," he exclaimed severely, "why do you egg this woman on? She promised to leave us alone."

"What!" yelled J. Arthur Benedict. "What does it mean?"

There was no vocal answer. But suddenly, as they stood there, a flash of light crossed the threshold, and a childish figure dashed in upon them.

"Grandma! Grandpa!" cried a musical little voice. "There's one thing I didn't tell Santa Claus about."

She stopped. J. Arthur looked at her in amazement. "What does this mean?" he queried again.

But his wife, Letty, was upon her knees, with the child in her arms. "It means," she murmured wildly, "that I've found the little kisdie that I'm looking for! My Letty—my little girl—my little girl—my baby!" She held out her hands appealingly to the man and woman who stood over her. "Ah!" she exclaimed, with her soul struggling into her eyes, "let me stay—let us all stay. I've brought you back your son. You give me back my baby."

At dinner, next day, Grandpa Benedict coughed and wiped his eyes. "There's one thing we all got in our stockings this Christmas that everybody hasn't got," he said.

Letty nodded. Her eyes beamed. "Love," she replied.

Little Letty passed her plate again. "You want to stay here, people," she announced to her young mother and to Joe. "They give you turkey any time you want it. Another piece of white meat, please—and lots of skin."



In the Church.

BY

EDWARD BOLTWOOD.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. A. LEMON

AFTER the matinée performance of "The Queen of Zara," two girls were putting on their street clothes in a damp dressing room under the stage of the Proolsburg Opera House. Miss Linda Leroy had been crying, and she now removed, with a bit of cheesecloth, the signs of tears from her pretty cheeks.

"I didn't mean to snivel, Vinnie," she murmured.

Vinnie Saunders smiled contentedly, adjusted her fine hat, and bestowed upon the mirror a glance of justified complacency. Her claret-colored gown was irreproachable, and she knew how to wear it. She ought to know; it was the only gown she had, claret-colored or otherwise.

"I guess you've never been stranded four hundred miles from New York, or you wouldn't take it so cool," complained Miss Leroy.

"Oh, yes," said Vinnie. "I've been stranded before. But I never will be again."

"How can you tell whether you will or not?" Linda threw off her flannel make-up sack viciously.

"Although any ignoramus, almost, might have guessed that this show would go broke. You could see right from the start that this Hungarian stuff was too classy and foreign. It would be over their heads on Broadway, to say nothing of—what's the name of this town?"

"Did you strike Meyer again for the fare?" asked Miss Saunders, calmly drawing on her long gloves.

"He said he'd have to hustle to keep out of jail, let alone hauling hungry soubrettes back East," replied Linda. "If Baumann hadn't skipped—but

there!" She made a final dab at her cheeks. "No more of this cry-baby, innocent business!" she exclaimed, and concluded with a peculiar, grating laugh.

The other girl glanced at her very sharply.

"Well, then, what sort of business?" said Vinnie, in an altered voice.

Linda slipped her graceful shoulders into a lingerie waist, and laughed less pleasantly even than before. Miss Saunders took a step toward her.

"You just tell me what you are going to do, Linda!"



"I'm sorry I can't do the 'Flame Dance' ever again."

"What are you?" retorted Linda sullenly. "We're all in the same fix—no money, show closed, and manager skeddaddled. You'll hunt a job in a restaurant, I suppose, or directing envelopes. I know that game. 'Reference, please. Oh, an actress!' And that's your finish. What did you do the last time you were up against it?"

"I borrowed off the character woman," said Vinnie.

"There isn't enough cash in the whole 'Zara' company to buy a wooden toothpick," said Miss Leroy. "Write home for money? Oh, yes! All the home I've got is a half-empty trunk, held for board on Forty-sixth Street. But that fellow from Chilli-cothe was in front here again last night, and—Vin Saunders, let go of me! Let go!"

Vinnie loosened her grip on her friend's wrist and sank down limply on a chair. Linda Leroy had been her chum for several seasons, and never a hint of anything like this had marred the companionship. Vinnie's blue eyes clouded. Gradually her surprise turned to a queer, lonely sense of helplessness.

"Oh, you needn't gape so!" pursued Linda, jabbing a hat pin fiercely into her dark hair. "What's the harm in borrowing money outside the company? Do you want me to starve, and drop sick in a charity hospital? What work are we folks fit for, except

the business we're in? And when we get shut out of that, what's the use?"

"None," said Vinnie thoughtfully. "We're no use, Linda, whether we're working or not. Stage people are no real use to anybody, I reckon. But then——"

"Remember your lines in that crazy 'Flame Dance' in the second act," suggested Miss Leroy. "Let things rip, and hurrah, boys, be joyful, and so on. What's the use?"

Vinnie jumped up.

"I'm sorry I can't do the 'Flame Dance' ever again," she said. "It was the only solo bit I ever had." And the two girls strolled out to the narrow alley.

"Well, a nap for mine," announced Linda. "We're squared at the hotel till morning, Meyer said. You do look like a duchess, or Maxine Elliott, or something, in that rig."

Vinnie walked away, frowning soberly, glad to be alone. With cruel abruptness, stage life had become a nightmare. It was not now the physical discomforts of it which repelled; not the constant want of rest, of wholesome food, of cleanly quarters. Vinnie had learned to put up with all that. It was now her heart which was sickened, weary, and fearful.

But she smiled happily at the thought of her refuge. When she took a long breath she could feel against her bare



Her impulse was purely mechanical.



"I hope you'll pardon me, madam, for doing what was improper," faltered the organist.

bosom a tiny chamois-skin bag. Sewn in it were several double-figured bank bills. Dollar by dollar, she had saved this secret treasure; even a bedroom intimacy had not revealed the bag to Linda Leroy. There was enough money in it to take Vinnie home to her old aunt in Florida, and for that purpose she was going to spend it all, that very evening.

II.

It was late in the afternoon. Walking briskly, Miss Saunders avoided the city's business district, and soon found a broad residential street, where she

slowed her pace instinctively. The quiet avenue suited her mood; the trees, and the grass, and the homelike, cheery houses were in keeping with her resolve. In one of the more modest houses a children's party was in progress. Two or three young mothers were talking at the gate, and a hum of juvenile voices drifted through the window. Vinnie almost laughed aloud. Meyer, and the runaway Baumann, and the chorus girls, and Linda Leroy began to seem prehistoric.

There was a big church on the next corner. The door of it was open, and Vinnie heard the deep notes of the or-

gan. She went in. The church was half dark, and Vinnie's veil was down. She could see no one in the vestibule, the pews, or the chancel; but the organ music resounded steadily.

"Some professor practicing," decided Vinnie; and she stole to a seat.

For the past months, all music had been to Vinnie merely a set of relentless wires to pull her tired muscles to and fro about the stage, and now the brooding chant of the organ affected her as would a drug. Bringing to her body a sense of mighty peace, like morphine, it quickened her mental vision. Real things of life took shape, although vaguely, in the girl's simple mind. Linda Leroy's hopeless question trembled on her awe-stricken lips.

"What use?" she muttered. "It's all over now—and what use?"

In the dim vastness of the church, echoing with religious melody, she felt infinitely changed.

Some ladies and gentlemen came into sight at the head of the centre aisle. Apparently they were arranging the seats for a wedding; one was busy with a pencil and notebook. They chattered gayly as they passed out. Vinnie was relieved when the muffled thud of the great door proclaimed that they had gone. But, thereupon, as if at a signal, the music halted. There was a quick pulling of stops, and then rioted suddenly through the church the mad, pagan strains of the "Flame Dance" from "The Queen of Zora"!

Vinnie Saunders sprang up, grabbing the back of a pew. For a moment she stood there dizzily. It was not the desecration of the church which moved her to run up the aisle to the curtained door of the organ room, next the chancel. Her impulse was purely mechanical. She was not aware of what she was doing.

"Don't play that!" cried Vinnie huskily. "You mustn't play that!"

The throbbing harmony was broken off short, and, in the silence behind the curtain, a woman's dress rustled as she rose from the bench.

"I am sorry, and I beg your pardon," said the unseen woman.

The conventional formula tumbled Miss Saunders out of the clouds and back to earth. She withdrew desperately into a shadowy recess in the wall.

"I am sorry," repeated the voice. "I thought I was quite alone. Of course, it was very wrong. May I ask, please, who is there?"

The curtain shook. Vinnie meditated ignominious flight, but before she could accomplish it the woman appeared. In years she was neither young nor old, and her figure was stooping and angular, in its shabby black gown. Vinnie noted the gown at once, and was immediately more comfortable. A glance at the thin face was likewise reassuring, for the woman was painfully and pitifully alarmed.

III.

"I hope you'll pardon me, madam, for doing what was improper," faltered the organist timidly. "Doctor Guryon, your clergyman, is kind enough to allow me to practice here. I am trying to get a position at the mission chapel—you may have heard—my name is Miss Watts. The position means a great deal to me. I hope what happened just now needn't be reported, madam. Doctor Guryon and the ladies of your parish are so strict."

"You had no business playing such stuff in church," said Vinnie loftily.

Her dramatic instincts were immensely pleased by the situation, by the idea of being taken for what she was not. Vinnie realized that this was a good part. She stamped a patent-leather shoe and tossed her fashionable hat, like a haughty prima donna.

"Tell me why you played it," she demanded.

"You—you wouldn't understand," said Miss Watts, clasping and unclasping her slim fingers. "It seemed as if I had to play it, madam. I must try to make you understand. Because I hope you won't find it necessary to report me. I am poor—I have to work hard for my living, and that of others. Are you a musician, madam?"

"Oh, no!" replied Vinnie, with alert suspicion.

The woman leaned despondently against the stone edge of the baptismal font.

"Then I am afraid it is useless to explain," she said.

"I should think so," declared Vinnie icily. "You ought to be ashamed."

Miss Watts straightened herself. Her eyes glittered faintly with an odd light.

"Ashamed!" she said. "You would not be ashamed of such music, if you were I. If you were half sick from the fight to make both ends meet—if you felt that you must cry out—Listen! I will speak. I don't care."

"No, no!" protested Vinnie, frightened by the woman's vehemence. "You're mistaken, I'm not—"

"Please listen," said Miss Watts impetuously. "It is all well enough for a lady such as you to talk. But I have to earn bread. I give piano lessons. I have to count the pennies, I can tell you. Good music is my greatest delight. But it seems as if I never can afford to hear it. I can't afford even the cheapest concerts, or a nice dress to wear, such as you have by the dozen. Last night the father of one of my pupils gave me a theatre ticket, which he got because he put a card in his bakery window. The performance was a new Austrian opera—'The Queen of Zara.' Perhaps you saw it?"



She burst turbulently into the stuffy hotel room.

"I've never seen it," murmured Vinnie.

"Well," resumed the organist, "I'd had a dreary, racking day. Maybe I wasn't quite myself last night—maybe I'm not now, or I wouldn't be talking like this. Anyhow, a certain air in the opera took the queerest hold on me. It satisfied a part of me that's starving—the wish for color, song, youth—I can't describe it. I went to sleep singing that wonderful 'Flame Dance,' over and over."

"But why—here in church——" stammered the girl.

"Why not?" contended Miss Watts, and her earnestness deepened. "Hasn't a church room for that which has held a despairing woman to her duty? Yes, I mean it. Last night—before the theatre—I was ready to forsake my duty."

"I don't understand," blurted Vinnie. "I don't see."

"Ah, I can't expect you to," said the music teacher softly. "But it's like this. I have to support my sister's orphan children. Last night I was ready to send them to a public charity. That would have been—been quitting, wouldn't it?" She made a brave attempt to smile at the phrase. "But," she continued, "that music reminded me of something I'd forgotten—the joy of living and being young. And it reminded me of one joy I can have, at least; and that is to try to keep those children young, and happy, and straight. A woman who has a chance to do that for anybody—but please excuse me, madam. I'm not very strong. My tongue has run away with me."

She passed her hand across her forehead in a bewildered fashion and eyed Miss Saunders wistfully, for it was evident that the lady was not heeding her apologies. Vinnie stared across at the pulpit, where a vagrant sunbeam had transformed the point of a common brass ornament into a radiant jewel.

"But this position at the chapel," said Miss Watts, "will make everything twice as easy for me. I am pretty sure to get it—unless I forfeit Doctor Guryon's good will. That is why I am so anxious—if he should learn I had misused the organ——" She hesitated timorously.

"A woman who has a chance to—oh, what's that?" sighed Vinnie, with an awakening start. "Oh, that's all right. He won't learn it from me."

"Thank you, madam, thank you!"

In a clock tower above them, the solemn bell chimed six.

"I'll have to be on my way," said Vinnie.

IV.

She burst turbulently into the stuffy hotel room like a bombshell in petticoats. Linda Leroy was sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Fare to New York!" shouted Vinnie, and slapped her bank bills on the washstand. "Board till we get a job! Plenty for both of us, and for Ruby, too, I reckon!"

"What—what——" gasped Linda.

She staggered up, a strange flush on her face.

"Oh, it's mine!" laughed Vinnie. "I didn't beg, borrow, or steal it. Get busy—there's a through train at quarter to seven."

"But wait—haven't you—oh, you brick!" choked Miss Leroy incoherently. "Vin, you're the squarest ever—the best. But haven't you——"

A knock on the door interrupted her. It was a grinning bellboy with a card. Linda tore the card into minute fragments and tossed them on the tray.

"Tell Mr. Nervy that's his answer," said she to the boy. "Tell him I've never spoken to a man from Chillicothe, and I don't intend to begin in Proolsburg, or anywhere else."

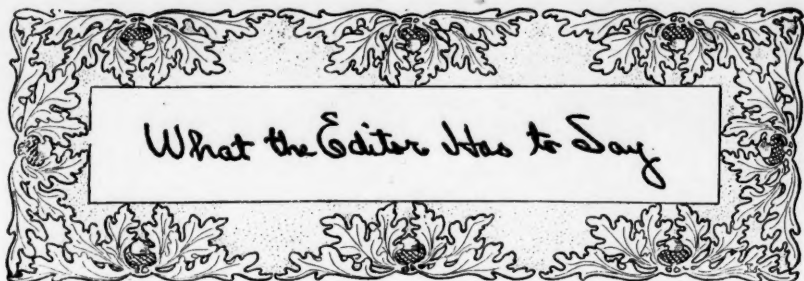
Then she turned, with grateful, brimming eyes, to her companion, who was throwing things into a dress-suit case and singing "The Flame Dance" at the top of her voice.

"That's right, practice it!" cried Linda breathlessly. "You'll be doing it to-night, and the rest of the season, most likely. 'Cause Baumann's turned up, safe and sound, with a roll, honest, the size of a stovepipe! And he's got syndicate backing and Chicago time—four weeks at the Auditorium—I guess that's bad, eh? And where on earth have you been, you dear old darling?"

Vinnie Saunders had reeled against the bureau weakly.

"Just walking around," she mumbled. "Went to church. Heard a sermon."

"Oh, you go on!" jeered Miss Leroy. "You can't kid me!"



What the Editor Has to Say

DID you ever consider how important it is that you should read good fiction? You may have known men and women who boasted that they never read a novel or saw a play. But look at them. Generally you will find them people of little accomplishment, with little else to boast of, in fact. After one has learned to read and write and cipher, there are many things important to know—history and politics, and foreign languages perhaps. But more important than any of these is a knowledge of the real character and soul of other men and women. It is this knowledge of human nature out of which spring sympathy, toleration for others, the social instinct, all the finer characteristics of civilized men and women. And fiction, whether in the form of drama, narrative or poem, is the great medium and text-book through which this knowledge is acquired. It may be learned to a certain extent from actual experience, but good stories will give to you the accumulated experience of hundreds of others, and teach you better how to understand the things that you have learned yourself. You may know, then, that we are proud, rather than otherwise, of the fact that this is an all-fiction magazine.

STORIES, if they are good ones, always affect people more profoundly than theories or explanations. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" did more

to stir men and women than all the articles and denunciations of slavery that ever were written. More, and better, history has been learned and remembered from Walter Scott and Lytton and Shakespeare's chronicle plays than ever was taught from the text-book. No one living in America today can keep fully abreast of his times, can catch fully the spirit and impulse of his race without reading some of the current fiction. The good story always holds the mirror up to nature, and, what no mirror can do, creates a permanent, indestructible image. If you will read the next number of SMITH's, and consider its contents, you can better appreciate what we mean.

NO matter what your age, sex, or previous condition of servitude, you should read in the February SMITH's, "The Understanding Heart," by Grace Margaret Gallaher. It is a love story, but there is nothing maudlin about it, nothing sickly sentimental—nothing, in fact, but unadulterated human nature and emotion of the finest sort. Do you number among your acquaintances, or have you heard of, a woman who fell in love with a man apparently her inferior in every way? You must have. There are so many of these cases, apparently so hard to explain. If you read "The Understanding Heart" you will find something of an explanation, something in the tale that will clear your vision like a magic

ointment and enable you to see things invisible before.

EVERY one has some pet ambition, some cherished hope, either secret or outspoken. If the palmist reads your palm, or the gypsy fortune teller at the summer resort asks you to wish a wish while she deals the cards, there is sure to be some secret desire foremost in your thought. Very few people "have their wish" literally, and those who do are not always the happiest. Sometimes destiny gives it to us in such ironic fashion that it turns to ashes in our hands, sometimes in such strange guise that we cannot recognize it when we receive it. In the February number you will find the story of a woman who had a cherished life ambition, which was gratified when the outlook seemed most hopeless, in a way that no one could have foretold. It is called "Her Triumph," and was written by Anne O'Hagan. If you can read it without the keenest interest, without a thrill of generous emotion, without a happy sense of the pathos and beauty of life—please consult a specialist at once, for your heart is not in the right place.

SOME people say that manners and politeness are forgotten in the hurry of these latter days, and that gentleness and consideration are becoming things of the past. Charles Battell Loomis, who is a living fount of valuable and original ideas, does not think so. He remembers a time when, as a boy, a great many people treated him with harshness and reproved him unnecessarily. When he was a boy he met numerous crusty old citizens who objected to his throwing stones and to other amiable juvenile eccentricities. Mr. Loomis throws stones no more, not even in a figurative sense, but he still has the habit of noticing the people he sees and remembering their characteristics. Read what he has to say next month in his little sermon "On Grouchiness." It will make you laugh, also it will make you think. Anything

that can accomplish these two ends has served a good purpose in the world.

DON'T forget to look for Frank X. Finnegan's story, "The Insurrection," in the February number. It is the story of a classroom in a public school, and unless you have been a teacher yourself you cannot imagine how much human nature to the square inch can be concentrated in such a room. Contrary to our republican theories of government, the room has much the atmosphere of the absolute monarchy, with the teacher occupying the position of supreme dictatorship. Like most absolute monarchies it is a prolific breeder of anarchists, insurrectionists, revolutionary spirits. Mr. Finnegan has told delightfully the rise and downfall of such a spirit. It is a funny story, and one that will hold your interest from first to last.

IN spite of the fact that stage coaches and highwaymen are no longer common, and that the trolley car is generally considered a prosaic and humdrum vehicle, the spirit of romance and adventure is not dead—nor the reality, either. Read "The Stolen Girl" in next month's SMITH's and find out for yourself. It starts with a girl in a trolley car and ends—we won't tell you where. We don't want to spoil the story. Elliott Flower wrote it. Also there is the funny story by Holman F. Day, "A New Trick for Old Cats," and the pathetic story, as full of dramatic incident as it is of real feeling, "Outside the Record," by Edward Boltwood. Then there is another installment of the greatest serial story of the year, "The Great Conspirator," by Roward Fielding, and many more good things beside. We have tried hard to make the February issue of SMITH's the best collection of fiction that you can find on the newsstands anywhere. If you hadn't intended to read it, and read it because of what we have just been telling you, you will feel like writing us to thank us for saying it.

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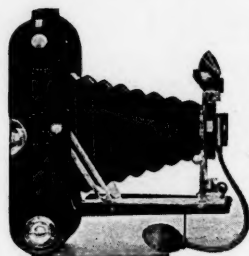
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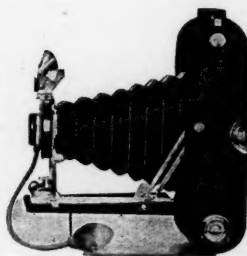
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(Signed) E. H. CLARK,
N. Girard, Pa.

When I enrolled I was an instrument man in the service of the St. Louis Terminal R. R. I have been in the Civil Engineering Department of the Mo. Pac. Ry. Co. for the greater portion of the past six years and am now Assistant Engineer of same. When I applied for a position with this road, I showed my I. C. S. Certificate and, after a perusal of same, the representative of the Company said to me: "I guess you will do all right. When can you report for duty?"
(Signed) W. H. MOORE,
404 14th St., Alexandria, La.

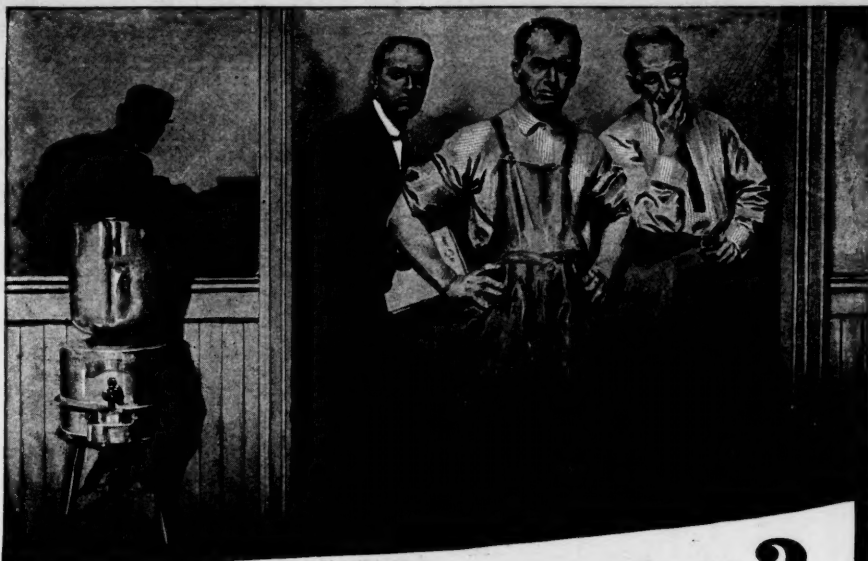
At the time I enrolled in your School of Mines, I was loading coal in a mine, but before I had more than half completed the Course, the position of Mine Electrician and Mine Boss was given me on account of my knowledge of electricity and electrical machinery that I received from the Schools. Just as I was completing the Course I was given the position of Mine Foreman.

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(Signed) H. W. MERRIMAN,
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(Signed) CHARLES HAGERTY,
Montpelier, Ohio.

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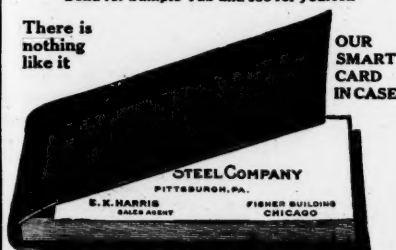
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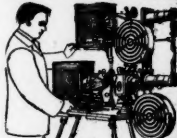
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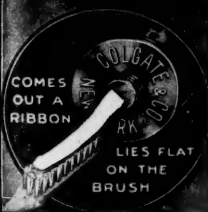
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